

The Visigoths, Sephardim, and Moors...

Introduction:

The history of Visigothic Spain as it pertains to the Jews is often told within the confines of a “Lachrymose Conception”, to use a term coined by historian Salo Baron. This term refers to how Jewish history is typically seen through a prism of victimhood. In fact, as I’ve delved deeper into the Jewish Question, what has truly amazed me is the visceral reaction Jews have to even the most measured criticisms, or implication that their historical behavior has possibly contributed to the tragedies they’ve suffered. The problem seems to be that victimhood carries with it a certain social tender, and once an individual or group acknowledges any responsibility for their situation, that currency is devalued. A German-Israeli historian once said: “It is the privilege of the oppressed people to arouse the conscience of the victors.” (Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut* (New York, 1947), trans. by Robert Warshow, p.116.)

This is often true even when not discussing Jews, particularly whenever Europeans have oppressed a non-European group. For example, the Indians under British rule; the Mayans under the Spanish, and the Magrheb under the French. Yet, curiously, this never reciprocated when the roles are reversed. While the native French have been repeatedly berated for their colonization of North Africa, no one recalls that France invaded Algeria in 1830, mostly to put an end to the Barbary Slave Trade, which had taken over a million Europeans into bonadage between the 1500’s and the early 1800s. The same trade had been affecting the newly independent American colonies as well. In 1786 Thomas Jefferson was visiting London where he met with and kindly asked an ambassador from Tripoli to discuss what terms the Barbary States might demand in order that they might cease and desist with capturing and enslaving American sailors. In a letter Jefferson wrote to John Adams, he recounts the conversation.

Soon after the arrival of Mr. J. in London, we had a conference with the Ambassador of Tripoli, at his House... We took the liberty to make some inquiries concerning the Grounds of their pretensions to make war upon Nations who had done them no Injury, and observed that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation.

The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the Laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-09-02-0315>

With this historiographic tendency in mind to disregard the behavior of victims, a fairly common view of the Visigoths is that they relentlessly persecuted the local Jews, due to a combination of religious fanaticism and jealousy of Jewish wealth. I will make no attempt to dispel the notion that the Jews were persecuted, however, the Visigoths were not some irrational two-bit villain. The late Samuel Parsons Scott who translated the Visigothic Code into English in 1910 called them “cruel” in their treatment of the Jews, yet he also said that they “manifested a sense of

humanity, and a genuine philosophy, rarely to be found even among nations that are thoroughly civilized.” (S.P. Scott. The Visigothic Code. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page xix)

In his 44 page preface he tells us that under the Visigoths...

...The punishment for crime was graded according to the wealth of the offender, rather than according to the rank and station of the party injured.

(S.P. Scott. The Visigothic Code. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page xix)

Again, Scott often spoke in a highly critical manner of the Visigothic treatment of the Jews, but in Book V, Title V, under section IX of his translation of a law regulating interest rates for money lending, he notes that “The law against usury was habitually violated by the Jews, who extorted enormous rates of interest both from individuals and from the Crown.” (S.P. Scott. The Visigothic Code. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 175) Quoting a passage from Deuteronomy seems appropriate here, even if it will be considered anti-Semitic. “For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.” (-Deuteronomy 15:6)

A person not imprisoned by a Jewish ‘Lachrymose Conception’ might deduce hereby that if the Visigoths graded punishments for crime according to the wealth of the offender, rather than according to the rank and station of the party injured, and that if the local Jews were exceedingly wealthy and had been violating the local laws more than most, then from these facts alone we would expect to see the Jews disproportionately targeted.

Typically, the Jews of 7th Century Spain are regarded as a powerless and benevolent minority, when in all likelihood, they had immense political and economic influence as well as a deep seeded hatred and animosity toward Christians. While the Catholic church was intolerant of heresy and paganism, the Jews of the period had just finished compiling the Babylonian Talmud around 500 AD, and were engaging in their own religious fanaticism. This is rarely if ever factored into the Visigothic equation.

It is my belief that the anti-Jewish legislation of the Visigoths arose in part from a desire to religiously unify the kingdom, but more so it was a reaction to hostile Jewish behavior. Standard operating procedure for the Catholics and the earlier Pagan Romans had mostly been to grant Jews complete autonomy. Yet, the Jews in Spain supported rebellious factions within the Gothic nobility. They allied themselves with enemies of the Crown. And, contrary to both secular and religious law, they continually enslaved Christians and circumcised them against their will. The anti-Jewish legislation of the period started out very mild, but steadily increased in severity and complexity over time, as initial attempts at curtailing Jewish legal infractions were largely ineffective.

The primary sources from the period are regrettably scant, they often contradict each other, and admittedly, I am not a trained historian nor do I have access to all of the primary sources. In

particular the letters of correspondence. Even if I did, I believe it is still worthwhile to cite the opinions of reputable scholars so as to bolster my own conclusions, or at least display that I haven't arrived at them via pure fantasy. The main historians whose works I will rely on and address include but are not limited to Edward Thompson, Bernard Bachrach, Rodger Collins, and Solomon Katz.

My detractors will invariably accuse me of having cherry picked the content and character of what these men wrote, so it should be stressed here that none of these historians take the same stance that I do. In fact, I would characterise most of them as largely philosemitic. Perhaps even a big apologetic. Rodger Collins writes that:

The treatment of the Jews by both the secular power and by the Church in the Visigothic kingdom is the most reprehensible feature of its history. From the reign of Reccared onwards a series of laws and conciliar decrees were enacted inhibiting the rights and liberties of Jews, even on occasion requiring them to abandon their own religion and convert to Christianity. Although this legislation was originally only directed against Jewish practitioners of Judaism, those who, willingly or otherwise, converted to Christianity soon came under the suspicion of the lawmakers and came to be supervised and restricted almost as fiercely as their former co-religionists. What began as a process of law-making aimed at the practitioners of a religion ended as one directed against a race.

Rodger Collins. *Early Medieval Spain*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Pages 129-130.

This sentiment is shared, to one degree or another, by many of the historians I've mentioned. Bachrach is a notable exception. While by no means hostile to Jews, he makes a very noble effort to view the period outside the purview of a lachrymose conception. However, the overall trend among most historians on the matter is to mention briefly what the Jews had been doing to the Christians and then proceed onward as if it were of little consequence. Herein lies one of my principle aims, which is not to justify each and every measure taken against the Jews, but rather to challenge the idea that the Jews were an innocent and powerless bystander exercising a general attitude of mutual tolerance and respect.

Chapter One:

Prehistoric Spain and The Arrival of The Goths

The first 'modern humans' entered what is now Spain and Portugal about 40,000 years ago. Genetically these were Western Hunter Gatherers. They all had blue eyes, and probably a swarthy complexion, but they did not resemble Sub-Saharan Africans as some people claim. Sometime around the 6th millennium BC, neolithic farmers from Anatolia began entering Spain. Then around 4,000 BC Indo-Europeans from the Pontic Steppe began moving into the whole of Europe. Modern studies have revealed that by 2000 BC 40% of Iberia's total genetic composition and nearly 100% of its Y-chromosomes were replaced by people with Steppe ancestry. (Olalde et al. The Genomic History Of The Iberian Peninsula Over The Past 8000 Years. Science Magazine. March 2019. Abstract.)

When the Greeks showed up the first millenium BC, they coined the term Iberian, which is what they called the locals. The nomenclature comes from the river Ebro which in turn may have simply been a local pre-Indo-European word for 'river.' However, it was the Romans who left the most profound linguistic and cultural impact during the 600 years they ruled the peninsula. With the exception of Basque, it is from Latin, that all the local languages are derived.

The Visigoths were a subset of an ethnic groups called the Goths, a Germanic tribe who like the Greeks and Romans also had Indo-European origins from the Pontic Steppe. The 6th century historian Jordanes, himself of Gothic extraction, claimed that his people originally came from what is now Sweden. This has become a matter of debate, but what's indisputable is that by the 3rd century, they had migrated from what is now Poland to an area around the Black Sea, where they had become divided into two major factions, the Thervingi and the Greuthungi, or as they later became known, the Visigoths and Ostrogoths. In the 4th century, Ermanaric, king of the Greuthungi, is said to have held dominance over both groups in a vast territory stretching from the Black Sea to the Baltic. (Herwig Wolfram. The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples. University of California Press. 1997. Page 27)

At the time, the Goths were probably very similar to other Germanic tribes, originally adhering to a form of Paganism and ancestor worship. However, during Ermanaric's reign, Ulfilas a Greek missionary, who had been enslaved by the Goths and raised among them, began converting his former captors to Arian Christianity, which differed from Catholicism insofar as it denied the holy trinity and considered Jesus separate and distinct from God. The Pagan aristocracy did not take kindly to these efforts, and under Athanaric, many Gothic Converts were persecuted. Christian foreigners, however, were left alone, as the Gothic motives were to protect Gothic culture and heritage and not to eradicate Christianity itself.

Around 370 AD, when the Huns began invading Europe various Gothic groups reacted differently. Some of the Goths tried to resist. Others, such as the Ostrogoths became vassals to

the Huns. The Visigoths, however, sought refuge within Roman territory. A chieftain named Fritigern appealed to Emperor Valens to allow his people to settle on land south of the Danube. The Romans and Visigoths had been warring with each other, but Valens allowed it, probably because he hoped to recruit Visigoths for the Roman army.

Shortly afterwards, the Visigoths suffered famine. The region where they settled had not been producing much food, and the Romans were experiencing logistical issues caused by their war with Persia. Under these conditions, the Goths were horribly mistreated by the locals. Gothic parents were forced to sell their children to Roman slave traders in return for dog meat. (Guy Halsall. *Barbarian Migrations and The Roman West*, 376-568. Cambridge University Press. 2008. Pages 175-177) Eventually, they began rebelling in what is known today as The Gothic Wars which resulted in the death of Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 AD.

Under Emperor Theodosius, the Visigoths were incorporated into the Roman empire as *foederati*. Relations remained turbulent however, and eventually culminated in a Visigothic invasion of Italy proper and the sack of Rome in 410. By the standards of the age, however, it was restrained. There was no general slaughter of the inhabitants and the two main basilicas of Peter and Paul were nominated places of sanctuary. Most of the buildings and monuments survived intact, albeit stripped of valuables. (Peter Heather. *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians*. Oxford University Press. 2006. Pages 227-228)

A short time later, the Romans permitted the Visigoths to settle on land in Southern France and Northern Spain, after they had successfully repelled other Barbarian tribes from invading Roman territory. By 476, however the Ostrogoths, who had remained in Eastern Europe as vassals of the Huns, invaded Northern Italy and established their own kingdom, thereby marking the end of the Western Roman Empire and the beginning of the autonomous Visigothic kingdom in Iberia.

Some sources have claimed that the Visigoths in Spain numbered in the hundreds of thousands, but this is likely impossible for a number of logistical reasons, and the archeological evidence doesn't support it. Rodger Collins makes a good case that they numbered somewhere between "20,000-30,000", or "the size of a small Roman army". The Hispano Romans he says "certainly exceeded a million." (Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Pages 25, 241) Whatever the actual figures were, most historians agree that the Visigoths were vastly outnumbered by their Hispano-Roman counterparts, who generally appear to have accepted their rule.

Chapter Two:

The First Jews in Spain

Regarding the earliest Jewish presence in Spain, another group of Semites known as the Phoenicians were active traders throughout much of the Mediterranean alongside the ancient Greeks and Romans. During the first millennium BC, they established settlements at what is now Cadiz. The Roman name for Spain, 'Hispania' may in fact be a latinized Phoenician word 'Isiphanim' meaning 'island of the hyrax.' As an aside, the City of Jerusalem also derives its name from another Phoenician word, 'Shalem,' the Canaanite god of dusk. In fact, the Phoenician and Hebrew languages were largely identical, and while the Phoenicians were not Jews per se, it's likely that the Jews formed out of the same ancestral group.

As biblical scholar Mark Smith writes:

Despite the long regnant model that the "Canaanites" and Israelites were people of fundamentally different culture, archaeological data now cast doubt on this view. The material culture of the region exhibits numerous common points between the Israelites and "Canaanites" in the Iron I period. The record would suggest that the Israelite culture largely overlapped with, and derived from, "Canaanite" culture.

Mark S. Smith. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Second Edition. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2002. Page 6.

During the late Bronze and early Iron Ages, most Semitic nations worshipped a divine couple, made up of a national god and a female consort. In the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, this divine couple was formed by the god Yahweh and the goddess Asherah. These Jews, if that is what they should be called, acknowledged the existence of other gods.

James Miller writes in his book, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, that while Yahweh emerged as the national god of Israel and Judah, "he probably was never worshipped exclusively by the early Israelites, and certainly not during the early tribal period...it must be presumed that Yahweh would have been perceived and worshipped in much the same fashion as the other gods of the Syro-Palestinian pantheon." (James Maxwell Miller. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Westminster John Knox Press. 1986. Page 110)

Mark Smith informs us that:

One can subject ancient Israelite texts to the same sort of analysis of divine tiers, as the Bible manifests the language of the divine assembly. A number of scholars have discussed the language of assembly, especially in the Psalms and other poetic books. Moreover, the presentation of Yahweh as a king enthroned and surrounded by his heavenly hosts can be found in many biblical passages, such as 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, and Daniel 7...

...At the top of the Judean pantheon stands the divine couple, Yahweh and Asherah. Many scholars believe that the asherah in the Jerusalem temple was none other than the symbol of the goddess, either a tree or wooden pole, and that the image was hers; this evidence would suggest that Asherah was a goddess venerated in the Jerusalem temple devoted to Yahweh and was therefore regarded as his consort. To this evidence, scholars would add the eighth-century inscriptions from Kuntillet'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom that mention "Yahweh and his asherah."

...What is clear from biblical criticisms of the asherah is a paradigmatic shift away from the model of the divine couple in charge of the four-tiered pantheon to a single figure surrounded by minor powers, who are only expressions of that divinity's power.

Mark S. Smith. The Origins of Biblical Monotheism. De Gruyter. 2001. Page 47.

As to Yahweh's origins the current consensus is that he was originally a "divine warrior from the southern region associated with Seir, Edom, Paran and Teman." (Mark Smith.. The Origins of Yahwism. De Gruyter. 2001. Page 42.) The oldest plausible recorded occurrence of the name Yahweh is on an Egyptian inscription from the time of Amenhotep III, referring to the Shasu nomads from Midian and Edom in northern Arabia. (John Day. Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series. Sheffield Academic Press. 2002. Page 15.) and (William G. Dever. Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From. Eerdmans. 2003. Page 125.)

Curiously, the Shasu, like the Israelites, were a nomadic tribe, who had a turbulent past with the Egyptians around the same time the Bible claims the Israelites left Egypt. Two Egyptian texts, one dated to the period of Amenhotep III (14th century BCE), the other to the age of Ramesses II (13th century BCE), refer to Yahu in the land of the Shasu nomads, in which "Yahu" is a toponym. (Siegfried Horn. Jericho in a Topographical List of Ramesses II. Journal of Near Eastern Studies 12. 1953. Pages 201-203.)

Scholar Michael Astour observed that the "hieroglyphic rendering corresponds very precisely to the Hebrew tetragrammaton of Yahweh, and antedates the hitherto oldest occurrence of that divine name – on the Moabite Stone – by over five hundred years." (Michael C. Astour. Yahweh in Egyptian Topographic Lists. In Festschrift Elmar Edel, eds. M. Gorg & E. Pusch, Bamberg. 1979. Page 18.) Scholar Van Der Toorn concludes: "By the 14th century BC, before the cult of Yahweh had reached Israel, groups of Edomites and Midianites worshipped Yahweh as their god." (Karel van der Toorn. Family religion in Babylonia, Ugarit, and Israel. 1996. Pages 282-283)

Whatever the case, Yahweh may have usurped El's position as the primary god of the pantheon and murdered all his children. As Mark Smith informs us...

One biblical text that presents Yahweh in an explicit divine council scene does not cast him as its head (who is left decidedly mute or undescribed, probably the reason why it survived the later collapsing of the different tiers). This text is Psalm 82 which begins in verse 1:

*God ('e'lo 'hu 'm) stands in the divine assembly/assembly of El ('a'dat'e 'l),
Among the divinities ('e'lo 'hu 'm) He pronounces judgment.*

Here the figure of God, understood as Yahweh, takes his stand in the assembly. The name El was understood in the tradition—and perhaps at the time of the text's original composition as well—to be none other than Yahweh and not a separate god called El. In any case, the assembly consists of all the gods of the world, for all these other gods are condemned to death in verse 6:

*I myself presumed that You are gods, (Elohim)
Sons of the Most High (Elyon),
Yet like humans you will die,
And fall like any prince.*

A prophetic voice emerges in verse 8, calling for God (now called 'e'lo 'hu 'm) to assume the role of judge of all the earth:

*Arise, O God, judge the world;
For You inherit all the nations.*

Here Yahweh in effect is asked to assume the job of all gods to rule their nations in addition to Israel. Verse 6 addresses the gods as “the sons of Elyon,” probably a title of El at an early point in biblical tradition (cf. El Elyon mentioned three times in Genesis 14:18–20). If this supposition is correct, Psalm 82 preserves a tradition that casts the god of Israel in the role not of the presiding god of the pantheon but as one of his sons. Each of these sons has a different nation as his ancient patrimony (or family inheritance) and therefore serves as its ruler. Yet verse 6 calls on Yahweh to arrogate to himself the traditional inheritance of all the other gods, thereby making Israel and all the world the inheritance of Israel’s God.

Mark S. Smith. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*. De Gruyter. 2001. Page 48.

The word ‘Isra-El’ is theophoric, meaning it’s the name of a deity and a verb. The particle ‘isra’ means ‘to struggle or fight’. Older translations took the name to mean, ‘one who struggles with El,’ yet some scholars now believe the original meaning was that ‘El struggles or fights.’

Whatever the case, the nation of Israel certainly struggled with their Canaanite/Phoenician neighbors. As Joshua 10:40 tells us “Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded.” While modern scholarship has placed doubts on the notion that the Canaanites were completely wiped out by the Israelites, it’s beyond question that the Jews took over much of their territory.

One of the oldest artifacts with Phoenician or ancient Hebrew inscriptions is the Moabite Stone. Inscribed sometime around 840 BC, it reflects the perspective of a young man named Mesha who ruled the kingdom of Moab, and describes how the Moabites retaliated against King Omri of Israel, for having conquered Moabite territory. What stands out is that, just as Yahweh told the Israelites to make war upon the Canaanites, the Moabite god Chemosh told the Moabites to make war upon the Israelites.

And Chemosh said to me, Go take Nebo against Israel, and I went in the night and I fought against it from the break of day till noon, and I took it: and I killed in all seven thousand men, but I did not kill the women and maidens, for I devoted them to Ashtar-Chemosh; and I took from it the vessels of Jehovah, and offered them before Chemosh.

James King. *Moab's Patriarchal Stone: Being An Account Of The Moabite Stone, Its Story And Teaching*. Bickers and Son. 1878. Page 56.

It’s certainly plausible that Yahweh cultists had traveled to Spain alongside the Phoenicians early on in the first millenium BC, but the question arises as to whether or not these were Jews in any modern sense. To avoid a prolonged discussion on the matter, suffice it to say that the first significant Jewish settlement probably appeared much later. Solomon Katz makes a convincing case that Jews may have had a presence in Spain as early as the first century AD, but that no real notable populations are recorded until the 4th century. It should be stressed here that the Jewish diaspora had existed long before the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD, as evidenced by, among other things, three previous Jewish expulsions from Rome between 139 BC and 61 AD. Historian Erich Gruen wrote in his work *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*:

Compulsory dislocation...cannot have accounted for more than a fraction of the diaspora...The vast bulk of Jews who dwelled abroad in the Second Temple Period did so voluntarily...Diaspora did not await the fall of Jerusalem to Roman power and destructiveness. The scattering of Jews had begun long before-occasionally through forced expulsion, much more frequently through voluntary migration.

Erich S. Gruen. *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*. Harvard University Press. 2009. Pages 3-4, 233-234.

In an interview with website [Jewishledger.com](http://www.jewishledger.com), Gruen also said:

...The Greek cities of the Mediterranean attracted Jews from every walk of life, from writers and intellectuals to mercenary soldiers who settled in places like Alexandria, Antioch, the cities of Anatolia, Macedonia, and Italy. Throughout the Greco-Roman period Jews in the diaspora vastly outnumbered those in the homeland.

<http://www.jewishledger.com/2015/01/conversation-prof-erich-gruen/>

By the early 4th century, the Jews in Spain had become quite successful agriculturalists, but as Solomon Katz notes, their activities hindered on Christian slave labor. He even considers the possibility that “The cultivation of land by the Jews of Visigothic Spain must have been made impossible by the decrees against the possession of Christian slaves or even coloni by the **Jews.**” (Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. The Medieval Academy of America. 1936. Page. 124)

As to the size of their population, the earliest estimates I’ve seen only go back to the 15th century after the Reconquista, where something on the order of 300,000 Jews supposedly converted to Catholicism, while another 80,000-100,000 were exiled. Whatever the case, it seems probable that Jews were vastly outnumbered by the Hispano Romans just as the Visigoths were.

Chapter Three:

The Visigothic Kingdom in Spain and Gaul

Now, with some preliminary backstory out of the way, here's a list of the Visigothic kings from the late 6th century up until the Muslim invasions in 711:

Reccared I 586-601
Liuvia II 601- 603
Witteric 603-610
Gundemar 610-612
Sisebut 612-621
Reccared II 621
Suinthila 621-631
Sisenand 631-636
Chintila 636-640
Tulga 640-642
Chindasuinth 642-653
Reccessuinth 649-672
Wamba 672-680
Erwig 680-687
Egica 687-702
Witiza 700-710
Achila 710-713
Roderic 710-711

Beyond the distinctly Gothic names, what immediately stands out is instability. In the 127 years, from their conversion to Catholicism to the invasion of the Arabs, the Visigoths had 18 kings, one of whom only ruled for a few months, and most only for a few years. One can easily imagine that Spain was full of rival factions, that it was seeped in complex politics and that every action a person of any importance took was a chess move. Concerning the Jews in this political mosaic, historian Edward Thompson wrote that:

"It will hardly be thought that the storms of these years centered on the position and liberties of the Jews in Spain. It is safest to think that, the conspiracies were the outcome of the rival ambitions of different Gothic noblemen."

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Pages 189-190.

However, in response to this Bernard Bachrach wrote:

Yet, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the Jews, as a formidable faction on the Visigothic scene, were supporters of Suinthila and Chindasuinth and were opposed to Sisebut, Sisenand, Chintila, and Tulga. The violent nature of the Visigothic royal succession strongly suggests that, for example, a noble like Chindasuinth who sought to overthrow the dynasty of Chintila would first try to obtain the support of the Jewish party that suffered under the policies of that dynasty. Therefore, while the issue of Jewish "liberties" was very probably not a *casus belli* for the various Gothic noblemen who sought to seize the throne, the position of the Jewish faction may well have been an important factor in determining the nature of the Jewish policy pursued by the king, whether he was a successful rebel or a legitimate monarch.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 14.

This is essentially the foundation of my own view. Jews were one of many ethnoreligious groups and political factions in Visigothic Spain vying for power and influence. When they aligned themselves with the kings who won the throne, they prospered. When they backed the contenders who lost, they suffered. This is not to say that Christians and Jews didn't consider each other theological opposition, or that some Visigothic kings and Clergy had no religiously based anti-Jewish motivations, but there is a modern tendency to view all past events involving Jews through a prism of unquestionable Jewish victimhood without any attempt to examine whether or not the Jews, at times, brought animosity on themselves via their behavior.

The first recorded instance of anti-Jewish policies in Spain actually predates the Visigoths. In the early 4th century, before the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Council of Elvira was convened, and out of 81 of its canons, a handful addressed Jews specifically: Canon 16 prohibited marriage between Christians and Jews, and proclaimed that parents who allowed their daughters to marry a Jew would be denied communion for five years; Canon 78 dictated that Christians who committed adultery with Jews would be ostracised; Canon 49 oddly forbade the blessing of Christian crops by Jews, the rationale being that it rendered Christian blessings "invalid and meaningless"; and Canon 50 forbade the sharing of meals between Christians and Jews.

Concerning pagans, however, the Council was even harsher. Canon 17 dictated that parents who allowed their daughters to marry pagans would be denied communion even at death. In canons 2-4, the council attempted to regulate the behavior of baptized pagan priests. In the interest of time, I'll only read canon 4 which states that "Flamens who have been catechumens for three years and who have abstained from sacrifices may be baptized."

It needs to be stressed here that one the Jews were not the most persecuted religious group, and more importantly the Jews themselves had already established cultural and legal precedent virtually identical to these canons. See the Laws of Bishul Yisrael whereby Jews were forbidden to eat with Gentiles lest they intermarry.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/947606/jewish/Laws-of-Bishul-Yisrael.htm

In chapter 7 of Deuteronomy, God tells the Jews while referring to Gentiles:

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Regarding Jewish customs in 7th century Spain, Bernard Bachrach states:

According to Jewish custom, a woman who had willingly and openly gone to live with a non-Jew would have been considered dead by her family and by the Jewish community. It was the legal duty of the community to stone her to death if she could be found. If she was not put to death, it is likely that such a woman and her offspring would have had no standing within the Jewish community.

Interestingly, Christianity had been largely considered a Jewish sect up until the 2nd century, when Jews began pushing Christians out of their religious community. Jewish scholar Lawrence Schiffman informs us:

...the Pharisees had emerged from the revolt against Rome as the main influence within the Jewish community. After the destruction, [of the temple] the tannaim immediately recognized the need to standardize and unify Judaism. One of the first steps was to standardize the Eighteen Benedictions, which, along with the Shema, constituted the core of the daily prayers.

At the same time, they expanded an old prayer to include an imprecation against the minim, Jews with incorrect beliefs. In this period, this could only have meant the early Jewish Christians, who observed the laws of Judaism but accepted the messiahship of Jesus. Although the rabbis continued to regard the early Christians as Jews, they reformulated this prayer in order to expel them from the synagogue, as testified to by the Gospel of John and the church fathers.

In addition, the tannaim enacted laws designed to further separate the Jewish Christians from the community by prohibiting commerce and certain interrelationships with them. Hereafter, it is possible to trace the process of separation from the end of the first century C.E. until the period of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 C.E.), when the tannaim outlawed the writings of the early Christians, declaring that scrolls or texts with divine names copied by Christians had no sanctity. This was clearly a polemic against the Gospels, which must have been circulating in some form by now.

In the time of Paul, about 60 C.E., the decision to open Christianity to gentiles had taken place, and the tannaim gradually found themselves facing a church whose members were not Jews from the point of view of halakhah [Jewish law]. To the rabbis, they were not Jews with incorrect views about the messiah but gentiles who claimed to be the true Israel. For this reason, the tannaim began to see the Christians as the other, not as Jews who had gone astray.

This process was complete by the Bar Kokhba period. Jewish Christianity had been submerged, while Gentile Christianity had gained the ascendancy. Since it was now virtually the only form of Christianity the rabbis encountered, they termed the Christians *notzerim* ("Nazarenes"), regarding them as a completely separate and alien religious group.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-jewish-christians-became-christians/>

Returning to Visigothic Spain, a commonly held belief is that Recarred's conversion to Catholicism was what marked a departure from otherwise amicable relations with Jews. In 589 he made Catholicism the official religion at the Third Council of Toledo. In canon 14, the council proclaimed that:

On the council's proposal our most glorious lord ordered that it should be entered in the canons, that Jews should not be allowed to have Christian wives or concubines nor to purchase a Christian slave for their own use; yet if any sons were born in such a marriage they must be taken to be baptized; it is necessary that they should not act in any public office that would provide them with the opportunity to inflict punishment on Christians. Indeed, if any Christians have been defiled by them in the Jewish rite or have been even circumcised, they should return to liberty and the Christian religion with no repayment of their price.

Amnon Linder. The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages. Wayne State University Press. 1997. Page 485.

Consider that the presence of laws is often taken as an indicator of overall social trends. Indeed, these anti-Jewish laws are the only evidence historians have that the Jews were oppressed by the Visigoths, but viewing laws as evidence of social trends cuts both ways. The laws barring Jews from positions of authority wherein they were able to punish Christians may have been enacted because Jews were in fact using positions of authority to punish Christians.

Moreover, it is astonishing that laws prohibiting the Jewish ownership of Christian slaves have ever been considered an injustice by anyone, and yet they frequently are. Andrew Sharf wrote, concerning such laws in Christian Byzantium that “The Jews were not allowed to own Christian slaves. This disability was also punitive. Slavery, as we have seen, was important to the economy and there was no disapproval of Christian slavery as such.” (page 22) In this day and age, many people might be hoodwinked by this rationale, until one realizes it can be used to justify the Atlantic slave trade. It is well known that Africans had been enslaving fellow Africans, and slavery was an important part of the economy. Yet it seems absurd that these facts alone should’ve entitled Europeans to African slaves. Had the Africans prohibited the sale of their fellow Africans to outsiders, surely no one today would consider it to have been a punitive measure.

Several things must also be stressed here concerning Reccared’s “forced baptisms” of “Jewish children”. According to Jewish law and custom, only children born to a Jewish mother would have been considered Jewish at birth. Thus children born to a Christian woman and a Jewish man were not considered Jewish by the community, now or then, unless they underwent the rites of conversion. Regarding conversion and how converts were generally received, Bernard Bachrach comments in his bibliography on the matter while addressing the framers of canon 14 at the Third Council of Toledo:

The idea of "mixed" marriages so common today, i.e., a marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew, is in-conceivable in early medieval Jewish law. Jews could marry converts to Judaism, though the latter were often discriminated against.

Bernard Bachrach. Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 147.

The Jewish Encyclopedia informs us that in the year 19 AD the Roman Emperor Tiberius expelled the Jews in Rome after they had committed fraud against one of their own converts:

Fulvia: A Roman lady of high station, converted to Judaism through the teachings of a Jew who had sought refuge in Rome to escape punishment. This impostor, together with three others, persuaded her to contribute purple and gold for the Temple at Jerusalem, which contributions they kept for themselves. The discovery of this fraud by the emperor Tiberius through his friend Saturninus, Fulvia's husband, caused the banishment of the Jews from Rome.

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6423-fulvia>

While this is a single anecdote, it’s a powerful one. It must’ve taken some nerve for Jews who had sought safety in Rome to con and rob a noblewoman whom they had converted to their own religion. Surely that reflects something of a general attitude of resentment both to Romans and converts. Converts aside though, as Bernard Bachrach highlights “*the illegitimate offspring*” of Jewish women and Christian men presented a “*slightly more ambiguous situation.*” He states that, since the Jewish community in Spain ostracized their women who had relations with non-Jewish men:

“...it seems reasonable to assume that problems arising from the baptism of the illegitimate offspring of the Jewish concubines of Christian men were not of central importance to Judeo-Christian relations during the reign of King Reccared...Reccared seems to have done no more in his

legislation than accept the laws of his Arian predecessors who are generally regarded as having been tolerant. The charge that he initiated a policy of persecution and forced conversion cannot be sustained.”

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 6.

Indeed, in Deuteronomy 23:2 the Jews are instructed that *“those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.”* -Deuteronomy 23: 2 (To be fair, verses 8 and 9 makes an exception for Edomites and Egyptians, allowing them to join the assembly of the Lord after the third generation. Whoopty fucking doo) This is reaffirmed within the Talmud, for example in Yevamot 76b, although it makes an exception for women of certain non-Jewish tribes. The general term for a child born to an illicit union in Judaism was “Mamzer,” and this is the term used in the original Hebrew of Deuteronomy 23: 2. This is described by several sources, as a child *“born of a Jewish father and a heathen mother or visa versa.”*

All things considered, Recarred’s legislation might be seen as fairly inclusive, since it seems likely that the Jewish community would have rejected all children born of mixed marriages. Whatever the case, it is quite curious that the Jews had laws that directly corresponded to those of the Third Council, and yet no one has ever dared call those laws anti-Christian.

While forced conversions took place under king Sisebut, Reccesuinth, Erwig and Egica, concerning the notion that Reccared was harsher on Jews than his predecessors, Bachrach shows us that, if anything, he was actually more lenient.

Among the laws promulgated in 506 by Alaric II for his subjects was one decreeing the death penalty for Jews convicted of converting or of attempting to convert Christians to Judaism. Reccared, in his laws, eliminated the death penalty for these offenses. When the provincial synod of Narbonne in 589 passed a host of acts severely injurious to Jews, including a prohibition against the performance of certain religious services, Reccared refused to approve the acts. In 597 Pope Gregory I wrote Reccared to call his attention to the fact that Jews at Narbonne, contrary to law, were dealing in Christian slaves and that royal officials were doing nothing about it. Reccared ignored the pope's request that the trade be halted. Most important, Reccared refused to enforce existing laws that in any way disadvantaged the Jews in his kingdom.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. (p. 6)

Chapter Four:

The Laws Under Alaric

To understand the historical context of Third Council of Toledo, we have to go back to the year 506, when King Alaric II had enacted the *Breviarium Alaricianum*. This was a continuation of the Visigothic Code enacted under King Euric, which itself was built upon Roman precedent. As Thompson notes, “Alaric discarded most of the Roman laws relating to the Jews, but he retained the ban on intermarriage between Romans and Jews, which Jewish law also prohibited and which the Council of Elvira had frowned upon at the beginning of the fourth century.” (E.A.

Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 52) It should be highlighted that the secular law, upon which Euric and Alaric built the Visigothic code, had also forbade marriage between Goths and Romans, regardless of religious faith, and this prohibition remained intact under Alaric and all his successors up until the mid 7th century. That said, Thompson notes, that under Alaric...

...Jews and Samaritans were forbidden to hold any public appointment, civil or military, or to be *defensor* of a city, or a prison guard; for they might use these posts to inflict harm on Christians, even on Christian priests. They were allowed to repair their synagogues, but not to build new ones: if they did so, the building was to be converted into a Catholic church, and the builders were to pay the ruinous fine of 50 lb. gold to the Treasury.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 52.

Again, if laws are to be taken as evidence of social trends and behaviors, we should conclude that at least some Jews had been using their positions of authority to abuse Christians in some fashion. Moreover, Jews at the time had a great deal of autonomy that Christians were required by law to respect. Thompson notes that...

...civil suits between Jews, if both parties agreed, might be heard by their own clergy rather than in the public courts; and in such cases the decisions of their clergy were as binding as if they had been imposed by a royal judge. Jews could not be dunned for debts to the Treasury or on any other account on the Jewish Sabbath.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 53.

What we see here is that overall Jewish autonomy was highly respected both under Alaric and Reccared, and that there was even a decline in the number of anti-Jewish laws under Alaric and a slight decline in the severity of the punishments for their infractions under Reccared. As for the three kings who succeeded Reccared, Bachrach tells us that:

“Liuva (601-03), Witteric (603-10), and Gundemar (610-12), Reccared's three immediate successors, continued his policy toward the Jews. They made no effort to enforce the existing anti-Jewish laws, and they promulgated no new anti-Jewish laws. At the local level both lay and clerical officials ignored the existing anti-Jewish legislation. In addition, Jews continued to own Christian slaves and hold civil and military positions in which they exercised power over Christians.”

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 7.

So basically, all the anti-Jewish laws from before and after Reccared were ignored and existed in name only. The real turning point in the 7th century toward an unquestionably anti-Jewish

policy in the Visigothic kingdom was when Sisebut acquired the throne in 612. According to virtually all sources and historians, Sisebut not only vigorously enforced the anti-Jewish laws on the books, but he went much further.

Edward Thompson informs us:

[Sisebut's] first aim was to remove all Christian slaves from Jewish ownership as quickly as possible and to free Christian freedmen from Jewish patronage. (Indeed, Sisebut even says, though he does not develop the point, that no hired workman may be employed by a Jew.) A Jew, therefore, must sell his Christian slave and the slave's property (peculium) to a Christian purchaser at a fair price. But he must sell him in the locality, near his normal dwelling-place, for the slave's convenience and also perhaps so as to prevent Jews from handing on their slaves to their brethren in Africa and France. If the slave had no property, he must supply him with some. Alternatively, he might manumit the slave, who would then become a Roman citizen liable to tax; but the Jew could not become the freedman's patron. Fictitious sales were severely punishable. These provisions were to be carried out before 1 July 612; and, if a Jew were found to be in possession of a Christian slave after that date, the Treasury would confiscate one half of his property, and the slave would be freed. The King next turned to proselytism and mixed marriages. In the matter of proselytism Sisebut reverted to the harsh position of Alaric II, which Reccared had mitigated. A Jew who converted a Christian to Judaism was now to be put to death and his property taken by the Treasury. If anyone who was converted to Judaism refused to return to the Church, he was to be publicly whipped, suffer decalvation, and become the slave of a nominee of the Crown. In the case of mixed marriages, which were illegal, if the Jewish partner refused to join the Catholic Church he or she must go into exile for life; but if such persons turned Catholic and were baptized, they were allowed to keep all their property, including their slaves. Slaves born of the marriage of Christian and Jew were Christians, whether they liked it or not. This part of the law, too, was to be put into effect before 1 July of the current year. The King ended his law by calling down a fearful curse on any ruler who should fail to enforce it in the future; and his curse was remembered with lively fear by King Erwig some seventy years later; Sisebut observes that the law was enacted 'with all the palatine *officium*', but makes no mention of the bishops.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. (p.165-166)

Regarding decalvation; some assert that it involved scalping, others are convinced that it was a matter of clipping a person's hair very short. In favor of the latter, various sources indicate that a person could undergo the punishment more than once. The Franks held a similar practice of shaving people's hair, as did the Jews. However, Roger Collins is convinced that it involved scalping, whereas all the other historians either have not drawn a conclusion or lean slightly toward it being similar to the Frankish custom. For a full analysis, see Jace Crouch's paper on the subject.

Decalvation aside, note that under Sisebut fictitious sales of slaves were "highly punishable." The insinuation is that the Jews were falsifying legal documents so that they could circumvent the law and retain their Christian slaves. Regarding forced conversions, Solomon Katz tells us that, in 613 Sisebut "*ordered that all the Jews must either quit his realms forever or become Christians.*" (Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. The Medieval Academy of America. 1936. Pages 11-12) As evidence, Katz cites a few sources. The most detailed but also the most far removed is that of Solomon ibn Verga, a Jewish historian of the 16th century, who according to Katz claimed that, "the Jews assembled with tears and groans in the court of the palace, obtained an audience and held a theological debate with the king, but to no avail." (Katz. Page 12.)

The work cited is called the *Shebet Yehudah*, or Scepter of Judah. While it's often regarded as a highly valuable text, it's also been widely criticized as an inaccurate historical source. Katz even notes in his bibliography that Verga committed "an anachronism and fixed the reign of

Sisebut in the year 800.” (Katz. Page 12) I don’t have access to the Shebet Yehudah, but here’s what scholar Rebecca Rist had to say about it.

...The Shebet Yehudah often deliberately veils original and daring views by embedding them in fictitious dialogues interwoven between real historical accounts of past persecutions. This serves to produce a complex mixture of history and fiction, while its satiric nature makes it problematical to untangle real opinions from intentional ambiguities.

Rebecca Rist. Papal Power and Protection in the Shebet Yehudah. *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 40, No. 4, December 2016. Page 491.

Another source Katz cites is Isidore of Seville, a prominent and contemporary 7th century Bishop in the region who wrote the following on the matter:

At the beginning of his reign [Sisebut] forced the Jews into the Christian faith, indeed acting with zeal, ‘but not according to knowledge’, for he compelled by force those who should have been called to the faith through reason. But, as it is written, ‘whether through chance or truth, Christ is to be proclaimed’. Sisebut was nonetheless eloquent in speech, informed in his opinions, and imbued with no little knowledge of letters.

I apologize, as I do not recall where I saw this particular English translation. A similar one can be found in Guido Donini's 1966 translation published by the University of Chicago. The original Latin can be found in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* on page 291.

Edward Thompson agrees with Katz that there were forced conversions, though he doesn’t cite Ibn Verga. He cites The Chronicle of 754, which says the following:

In the time of Heraclius, in the era 612, in his second year as emperor, when the Saracens were still under tribute to the Romans, Sisebut, a wise man of profound learning, became king of Spain and ruled for eight years. He conquered the Roman cities throughout Spain. He compelled the Jews to enter the Christian faith.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 94.

Thompson also cites an entry in the Chronology listed in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, that states:

Heraclius governs for the seventeenth year. [During the fourth and fifth year of the most religious ruler Sisebut] the Jews in Spain convert to Christianity.

Stephen A. Barney. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Cambridge University Press. 2006. Page 133.

Thompson also highlights that at the subsequent Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, some 12 years after Sisebut’s death, the Clergy “explicitly and firmly condemned the policy of force, and referred specifically to those who had been violently converted by the most religious prince Sisebut.” (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Pages 166-167.)

Here’s the pertinent canon 57 translated by scholar Amnon Linder:

On the Jews, however, thus did the Holy Synod order, that no one should henceforth be forced to believe, *God hath mercy on whom he will and whom he will he hardeneth*; such men should not be saved unwillingly but willingly, in order that the procedure of justice should be complete; for just as man perished obedient to the serpent out of his own free will, so will any man be saved-when called by the divine grace-by believing and in converting his own mind. They should be persuaded to convert, therefore, of their own free choice, rather than forced by violence. Those, however, who were formerly forced to come to Christianity (as was done in the days of the most religious prince Sisebut), since it is clear that they have been associated in the divine sacraments, received the grace of baptism, were anointed with chrism, and partook of the body and blood

of the Lord, it is proper that they should be forced to keep the faith even though they had undertaken it under duress, lest the name of the Lord be blasphemed and the faith they had undertaken be treated as vile and contemptible.

Amnon Linder. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*. Wayne State University Press, 1997. Pages 486-487.

The line that Linder translates as “*rather than forced by violence*” could easily be translated as “rather than by impelling or instigating them.” In fact, the English verb “to impel” is derived from the Latin word “*inpello*” which is the word used in the original text. The Latin word holds both literal and figurative connotations, and Linder’s translation of it to refer to “violence” conjures up very specific images that may be unwarranted. I’m not a trained Latinist, but I might translate the line as: “Therefore, it is not by force, but free will that they be persuaded to convert, rather than by impelling/instigating them.” For quick reference, here is the original: “*Ergo non vi sed liberi arbitrii facultate ut convertantur suadendi sunt non potius inpellendi.*”

While Thompson agrees with Linder’s translation, he also tells us that “No details are known about these forcible conversions”, and moreover, that they were made “without the enactment of a law and without the authority of any Church council.” (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Pages 166-167.)

Indeed, there is no contemporary document, secular or ecclesiastic, of any order given by Sisebut that compelled the Jews to either convert or leave the realm, as Solomon Katz phrased it. The best primary sources are the aforementioned minutes and canons from the Fourth Council of Toledo, and they never make clear what these conversions entailed or how they were carried out. An additional source Katz cites later on is Samuel Usque, a converso Jew living in Portugal during the 16th century. Again I don’t have access to the original text but Katz claims that “Usque says that Sisebut first gave the Jews the choice between baptism and death, but later permitted them to leave the country if they preferred. Usque himself depends upon earlier sources which are no longer extant.” (Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. The Medieval Academy of America. 1936. Page 12) While I truly do consider it plausible that Usque’s account may have been derived from an accurate source, I also see it as entirely possible that 16th century Jews, writing during the reconquista and the inquisition, might have easily filled in the gaps of the historical record in order to render it more colorful and dramatic.

It should be noted here that in 653 King Reccesuinth said the following in the Visigothic Code before enacting some of the harshest anti-Jewish legislation to date:

Hitherto, we have directed our steps cautiously through the arduous paths which traverse the iniquities of the Jews; and have used moderation in the restraint of human crimes and infirmities.

S.P. Scott. *The Visigothic Code*. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 363.

It seems odd that Reccesuinth would have uttered this, if the conversions under Sisebut had been of a particularly violent nature. Indeed, while Isidore of Seville criticised the forced conversions under Sisebut, he also records the king as having been exceedingly merciful toward the Byzantines, after he waged war to expel their outposts from Spain. He writes that Sisebut... “was so merciful in the wake of victory that he ransomed many of the enemy, who had

been reduced to slavery and distributed as booty by his army, using his own treasure for their redemption.” (Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 87.) The Chronicle of Fredegar also claims that Sisebut was appalled by the massacre of Byzantine soldiers by his own troops and cried out “Alas that there should be such bloodshed in my time.” (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 162.) Clearly, Sisebut had a sense of human compassion and decency.

Nevertheless, the wording at the Fourth Council of Toledo does indicate forced conversions, even if it's not specific about their nature, and the Church at the Fourth Council clearly distinguishes between previous anti-Jewish policies under Reccared and those under Sisebut. The Jews were forbidden from owning Christian slaves before under Reccared, Liuva, Witteric and Gundemar. The key difference, however, between Sisebut and these other kings may be that Sisebut is the only one who tried to enforce the law. Indeed, Thompson highlights that “Reccared's regulations about the Jews had not been strictly enforced by Witteric and Gundemar; and this Sisebut deplored.” (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 165) Among his sources, he cites a section of the Visigothic Code authored originally by Sisebut.

The authority of the law promulgated by our lord and predecessor, Recaredus, declaring that Christian slaves shall under no circumstances remain in the power of Jews, would be sufficient, if the depravity of the Jews had not afterwards corrupted the minds of princes, and they had not demanded and obtained benefits for themselves contrary to the principles of justice.

S.P. Scott. *The Visigothic Code*. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 369-370.

Essentially, Sisebut was angered by the fact that the Jews were lobbying the Gothic Kings so that they might circumvent the law. Moreover, if Sisebut violently forced conversions, it should be taken into account that the Jews had violently forced Christian men to be circumcised, and we might infer from the historical record that this had been occurring for hundreds of years. Perhaps more to the point, Sisebut had done nothing to the Jews in 616 that the Jews themselves had not done to others in the past. After the Maccabean revolt in Judea, when Nationalist Jews had expelled the Seleucid Greeks, they forcibly converted many locals, such as the Idumeans and the Itureans. They murdered apostates who had abandoned Orthodox Judaism in favor of Hellenistic Judaism, which they considered a heresy, just as the Catholics in Spain began to consider Judaism. In 167 BC, when asked by a Greek representative to offer sacrifice to the Greek gods, Jewish Kohen Mattathias murdered the representative alongside a fellow Jew who was willing to perform the act. (1 Maccabees 2:22-30)

First century Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the Jews...

...subdued all the Idumeans; and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to the use of circumcision, and of the rest of the Jewish ways of living.

Antiquities of the Jews XIII 9:1

As to why Jews forced conversions, the website MyJewishLearning highlights the potential political motive.

First of all, historically there's been a significant connection between proselytizing and politics. New groups come to power and coerce the local people to join their religion. Among many other advantages, converting conquered lands to your religion makes them easier to govern. This accounts for much of the spread of Christianity and Islam.

Historically, Jews have not had this kind of power, though there is one known case in which Jews did in fact force gentiles to convert. A group called the Idumeans was forcibly converted by second generation Maccabees. However, in his book *Galilee: History, Politics, People*, Richard A. Horsley wrote that, "the Idumeans' 'conversion' was not especially effective." And it doesn't appear that the policy of forced conversions was popular with other Jewish zealots of the time.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-proselytism/>

Chapter Five:

Jewish Proselytism

While the exact nature and extent of Jewish proselytism is debated by scholars, the general consensus is that it existed in some form between 500 BC and the first century AD. During this period, there appears to have been a massive growth in the Jewish population, based off the figures of Josephus, but like most estimates of historical populations in antiquity, his figures are probably questionable. There are no records of Jewish missionaries or missionary tracts, and recall that Jews had begun reacting poorly to Christians in the second century, precisely because they “were not Jews with incorrect views about the messiah but gentiles who claimed to be the true Israel” as Lawrence Schiffman said.

The Jewish encyclopedia states the following on the matter:

The fervor of proselytism was indeed one of the most distinctive traits of Judaism during the Greco-Roman epoch—a trait which it never possessed in the same degree either before or since. This zeal to make converts, which at first sight seems to be incompatible with the pride of the "chosen people" and with the contempt which the orthodox Jew professed for the foreigner, is attested by numerous documents, and, better still, by facts themselves. Various methods were employed to increase the flock of Israel. The most brutal was that of forced conversion—that is to say, circumcision—such as had been imposed by John Hyrcanus on the Idumeans, and by Aristobulus upon a portion of the Itureans. Next was the conversion of slaves owned by Jews as their individual property. But it was especially the moral propaganda, by word, example, and book, which was most productive of success throughout the whole extent of the Diaspora.

It must be admitted that Judaism lacked certain of those attractive features which drew the multitude to the cult of Mithras and of the Egyptian deities. Its physical exactions repulsed those wanting in stout courage; its cult, devoid of imagery and sensuous rites, presented only an austere poesy separating its adepts from the world, and cutting them off to some extent from communion with the cultured.

But the practical and legal character of its doctrine, furnishing a rule of life for every occasion, could not but appeal to a disorganized society. The purity and simplicity of its theology captivated the high-minded; while the mystery and quaintness of its customs, the welcome Sabbath rest, the privileges enjoyed at the hand of the public authorities, recommended the Jewish faith to those more materialistically inclined. Moreover, it knew how to insinuate itself by a very clever literature, in part pseudopigraphic, in part apologetic, claiming as its allies and forerunners the greatest geniuses of ancient Greece, the poets, the thinkers, and the sibyls. It also called into play the famous oracles, and took on a Grecian aspect, while extenuating or concealing under the mantle of allegory and symbol those dogmas and observances that were shocking to rationalism. In brief, it was a religion essentially supple and elastic under an appearance of rigidity, and one which knew how to be at once authoritative and liberal, idealistic and materialistic, a philosophy for the strong, a superstition for the weak, and a hope of salvation for all.

Jewish Encyclopedia. 1906. Diaspora: Jewish Propagandism. (p. 569)
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5169-diaspora>

This entry has a number of striking revelations. Whenever we encounter cases in the middle ages of Jews circumcising Christian slaves, we might view them as the direct counterpart to forced baptisms. This entry also claims that the appeal of Judaism to voluntary converts was in part based on the privilege granted to it by greater society; a curious assertion, since the common accusation against Gentiles is that they rejected, and confined Jews to the lowliest places in society. To be fair, this is mostly in reference to the period between 500 BC and 100 AD, and it wouldn't be until around the time that the Jews compiled the Talmud in 500 AD that that anti-Jewish sentiments began to manifest more notably. But what I find most fascinating is

that this entry states that the religion “insinuated itself” into society, often by misrepresentation in order to appeal to those individuals more materialistic.

Chapter Six:

Forced Circumcisions of Slaves

Pseudepigrapha and materialism aside, out of all the complaints of European Christians toward Jews in the Middle Ages, the most consistent one is that they held Christian slaves and circumcised them. As early as the second century AD, when Rome was still Pagan, emperor Hadrian issued a decree banning circumcision in the empire. Antoninus Pius later relaxed Hadrian's legislation and made it so that Jews alone could circumcise their sons, but said that they were not to perform the ritual on others. (Jewish Encyclopedia 1906. Diaspora: Prohibition of Circumcision. Page 571. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5169-diaspora>) As time goes on, it becomes apparent that Jews continued to circumcise non-Jews regardless. In Italy during the late 5th century Pope Gelasius "wrote to three bishops...to investigate a charge that a Jewish slave owner had circumcised and converted to Judaism one of his Christian slaves contrary to the latter's will." (Bernard Bachrach. Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 28.)

100 years later, Pope Gregory I expressed concern in a letter that four Christians had been ransomed from captivity among the Franks and yet were now serving as the slaves of Jews at Narbonne. Edward Thompson notes that "Gregory says nothing about the illegality of this; he feels it to be an outrage, but he simply gives instructions that they should be redeemed. The local Visigothic authorities had evidently done nothing." (E.A. Thompson. The Goths in Spain. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 111.)

While these are only two examples, they are remarkable. The Pope is essentially unable to protect his religious flock and is at the mercy of local officials who seem unwilling to uphold the law. There are those who would claim this speaks to how tolerant locals were, but I see it as a blatant display of the extent of regional Jewish power and influence. They could literally own, hold, and circumcise Christian slaves, regardless of any laws set against it. Not even the head of the Roman Catholic Church could stop them.

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, by the 6th and 7th centuries, Jews had become the chief slave traders in Italy, and were also active in Gaul. The parallels between Italy and Spain are notable. During the early middle ages both had Gothic Arians, Roman Catholics and Jews spread out along their political spectra. While I'm not aware of any sources claiming that the Jews dominated the slave trade in 7th century Spain, they certainly played a major role in the subsequent regional trade, after the Arab conquest. (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13798-slave-trade>)

In the 9th century, a little over a hundred years after the fall of Spain to the Muslims, Louis the Fair in France is recorded to have granted charters to Jews visiting his kingdom from Al-Andalus, that is, Muslim Spain. He permitted them to possess and sell slaves, provided the latter had not been baptized. The archbishop of Lyon claimed that, notwithstanding this provision, the Jews kept Christians as slaves, citing the instance of a Christian refugee from

Cordova who declared that his coreligionists were frequently sold, as he had been, to the Muslims. The Jewish Encyclopedia also notes that many Jews of the period owed their wealth to the trade in Slavonian slaves. 19th century historian Israel Abrahams confirms this.

...in the tenth century, the Spanish Jews often owed their wealth to their trade in Slavonian slaves, whom the Caliphs of Andalusia purchased to form their bodyguards. In Bohemia the Jews there purchased these Slavonian slaves for exportation to Spain and the west of Europe, where they often fell into the kindly hands of Mohammedan masters...

...The Church stirred itself vigorously to buy or confiscate these slaves from the Jewish dealers, but the aristocracy connived at and profited by the trade. William the Conqueror is reported to have brought Gallo-Jewish slave-dealers with him from Rouen. There was good reason for the solicitude of the Church and for its desire to prevent Jews from retaining Christian slaves in their houses. The Talmud and all later Jewish codes forbade a Jew from retaining in his home a slave who was uncircumcised. On the other hand, such slaves were only rarely converted to Judaism. No doubt they often drifted into conformity with the beliefs and practices of their masters, but the chief thing that was expected of the slave was to abstain from work on Saturdays. The Jewish owner, in fact, was forbidden to derive any profit from his slave's disobedience to the Law of Moses. Further, since no Jew might drink wine touched by an uncircumcised person, it was obvious that a slave who had not undergone this rite was a useless incumbrance. But the rite was never forced on the slave up to the tenth century; curiously enough, the tendency to enforce it grows with the middle ages, and we find the curious anomaly that the sixteenth century finds Jews more resolute in this matter than the tenth century found them. Certainly in the tenth century any Christian slave could refuse to be circumcised, and in that case his master was unable to retain him.

Israel Abrahams. Jewish Life in the Middle Ages. The Macmillan Company. 1896. Pages 98-99.

While not all of what Abrahams says is directed specifically at 7th century Spain, what he reveals is still relevant. He informs us that the Jews before and after the Muslim conquest had motives to circumcise Gentiles without actually converting them to Judaism. In fact, this is a precedent laid down long before the Talmud. As Genesis 17:13 says: "Generation after generation, every male must be circumcised when he is eight days old, including those born in your household and those purchased from a foreigner--even those who are not your offspring."

(Genesis 17:13)

His assertion, however, that a Christian male living under Jewish patronage could refuse circumcision is quite doubtful. If all a male needed to do to be set free or be sold to a fellow Christian was to refuse the rite, it stands to reason that the Jews would have lost a fair amount of male slaves. Also recall that the Jews had been using fictitious bills of sale to circumvent secular and ecclesiastic law to retain their slaves, when their ownership of them was outlawed. Thus they apparently had little respect for the will of the monarchy and the Catholic Clergy, let alone a single male slave. On the other hand, many of these slaves were likely born under Jewish patronage and ownership and likely circumcised at birth, thus many never had a chance to refuse the ritual. Also consider that if a male slave refused circumcision that probably didn't guarantee the freedom or sale of any of his kin who were also under Jewish patronage. Thus any adult male would have been under considerable pressure to obey the will of his master.

Furthermore, the ninth century Islamic scholar, Ibn Khordadbeh, observed and recorded routes of Jewish merchants from the South of France to Spain, and noted the presence of female slaves, eunuch slaves, and young slave boys. There can be little doubt that some of these eunuchs had objected to having their genitals entirely removed, and yet their Jewish masters removed them anyway. Supposedly, the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam identifies a specific town in Spain where the Jews castrated their slaves and then shipped the survivors

overseas, but I have not been able to review the text myself. Either way, Eunuchs and European females were in high demand in the Islamic world, (Bernard Lewis. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*. Oxford University Press. 1990. Pages 54-62.) and it was mainly Jews who were able to freely travel between Christian and Muslim territories.

Seeing how the advance of Islam had only just begun in the early 7th century, the Jews in the Visigothic kingdom were probably not selling eunuchs to Muslims. While Sisebut had prohibited the Jews from selling Christian slaves overseas, which might suggest that the Jews had been doing so, it doesn't evidence that the slaves were being made into Eunuchs at the time. Whatever the case, the primary concern here is whether or not Christian slaves living under Jewish patronage truly had the freedom at any point in time to reject circumcision or any other religious rite their Jewish masters imposed on them.

Chapter Seven:

Female Slaves of Jewish Men

On matters regarding female slaves, Israel Abrahams quotes 11th century scholar, Hai Gaon, after noting that female slaves were converted more frequently than males.

With the female slave, however, conversion to Judaism was much more frequent and natural. I must find room for one quotation from a Jewish authority of the early part of the eleventh century: 'In certain places' he says, 'there are only Egyptian female slaves in the market, and the non-Jews permit the Jews, as in Babylon, to buy these and no others. Some of them become Jewesses at once, some after an interval, some refuse altogether to be converted. The Jews have great need of their services in these places, otherwise their own sons and daughters would be compelled to carry the water on their shoulders from the springs, and go to the ovens with the non-Jewish maidservants, who are of low character, and thus the daughters of Israel might fall into disrepute and danger.

Israel Abrahams. *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*. The Macmillan Company. 1896. Page 100.

Gaon was commenting on Jewish behavior in other parts of the world some three hundred years after Visigothic rule in Spain, but Abrahams' book is meant to speak broadly on Jewish Life in the Middle Ages, thus unless he states otherwise, it seems fair to take this as at least somewhat generally representative of Jewish life in the period, regardless of location or year. With this in mind, on page 95 of his book, Abrahams expounds further on the relations of Jewish masters and female slaves:

Offences between Jewish masters and their female slaves did occur, but the penalty exacted by the Jewish authorities was a severe one. The slave was taken from her owner, she was sold, and her price was distributed among the poor. Then the offender was flogged, his head was shaved, and he was excommunicated for thirty days. Or the owner, to escape the penalty of his crime, voluntarily gave his slave her liberty and recognized her son as his legitimate offspring.

Israel Abrahams. *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*. The Macmillan Company. 1896. Page 95.

Concerning this last part, while genetic data on Sephardic Jews are lacking, the data on Ashkenazi Jews show that they carry substantial amounts of Eastern European mtDNA, (Marta D. Costa et al. A Substantial Prehistoric European Ancestry Amongst Ashkenazi Maternal Lineages. *Nature Communications*. 2013.) (For those interested [Wikipedia also has a wealth of links and references on Jewish DNA](#).) meaning that they are descended in large part from Gentile women enslaved and abused by Jewish men. The evidence for this conclusion is admittedly circumstantial, so it's only fair to give another explanation. Entry into Judaism set the bar quite high for men by requiring their foreskin to be removed. No such invasive mutilations, however, were required of female converts. Thus we might naturally expect there to be more female converts from this fact alone. (I have not cited or referenced it here, but Mario Ferrero wrote an interesting paper on why Judaism stopped proselytizing/lost out in the competition against Christianity. It's called *Competition Between Exclusive Faiths: Why The Jews ceased Proselytizing*.)

However, Jewish author and geneticist, David Reich highlighted in his book, *Who We Are and How We Got Here*, that African Americans' European admixture mostly comes from European men, and suggests that this was due to the inequitable power White men had over Black female slaves. He posits the same mechanics of social inequality as the explanation for why the

European ancestry of Mestizos is largely from males as well. If we accept Reich's explanation in these cases, it seems only fair to apply the same mechanics of social inequality to explain the disproportionate presence of European mtDNA within parts of the Jewish diaspora, considering that Jewish men often possessed many European slaves and that from a religious standpoint, their interactions with all Gentile women were otherwise limited. (David Reich. Who We Are and How We Got Here. Kindle Edition from Pantheon Books. 2018. Chapter 10: The Genomics of Inequality.)

Chapter Eight:

The Abrupt Policy Changes of Sisebut

At least on paper, ecclesiastic leaders and Visigothic monarchs had forbade Jews from holding Christian slaves and circumcising them for quite some time when Sisebut assumed the throne in 612. Thus we are left wondering as to the root cause of his drastic policy changes. Solomon Katz, of course, claims that Sisebut was motivated by greed and wanted to confiscate Jewish wealth.

Sisebut's intolerance has been attributed to the clergy, but against this opinion we must set the disapproval of Isidore of Seville and of the Fourth Council of Toledo, over which he presided. It has been suggested that these measures were forced upon Sisebut by the Emperor Heraclius of the Eastern Roman Empire, in the treaty concluded between them. There is, however, no text to bear out this statement. A similar attempt at forcible conversion, which Fredegar attributes to King Dagobert in Gaul, is of some interest, especially since the discovery of a contemporary document which confirms Fredegar. But the treaty between Heraclius and Sisebut was not signed until 616, so that the connection must be dismissed. All that we know for certain is that Sisebut adopted the measure without consulting any council. We may, then, attribute the king's resolution either to his own whim or to the desire of obtaining the possession of property by means of confiscation. The constant reference in the Visigothic laws to the confiscation of the property of Jews shows it to be one of the basic motives for their persecution.

Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Page 12.

Katz says that Sisebut's intolerance couldn't have been motivated by the treaty with Heraclius, because it wasn't signed until 616, yet recall that Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* states in one of its *Chronologies* that during the fourth and fifth year of Sisebut's rule, the Jews converted. This lines up the dates almost perfectly. Sisebut's initial laws enacted in 613 might have been entirely of his own initiative, or at least domestic in origin, but perhaps the forced conversions of the extra legal nature took place much later in 616, after the Byzantines and Visigoths had signed a treaty. But why would the Byzantines want the Visigoths to convert the Jews? I will attempt to address this shortly, but for now let us consider the proposed explanation that Sisebut was motivated by greed and the desire to confiscate Jewish wealth. Bernard Bachrach makes a counter argument to Katz by highlighting that the Visigothic crown made relatively little direct economic gain from Sisebut's policies.

Jews who converted to Christianity were not subject to economic sanctions. If the Jews complied with the laws requiring them to give up their Christian slaves, the royal fisc still gained nothing directly, and it gained indirectly only if the newly freed slaves became productive taxpaying subjects. The Crown benefited from slaveholding Jews only when they refused to free their Christian slaves, whereupon the king could free the slaves and confiscate half of the offenders' remaining property...

Moreover, if Sisebut's motivation was economic, it seems that his policy was unnecessarily tortuous and less than efficient. First, the violation of the law had to be encouraged; hardly a useful precedent, even when violators are, though in this case they were not, popularly viewed as cancers of society; second, the royal fisc gained only marginally and indirectly when these laws were disobeyed; and third, more efficient means, such as those devised by later Visigothic kings to benefit the Crown economically through the exploitation of Jews, were available, though not employed by Sisebut...

...Further study of Sisebut's anti-Jewish legislation suggests that it was the king's policy to weaken the political influence of the Jewish community by striking a blow at its economic strength. As Jewish slaveowners were deprived of their Christian slaves, those Jews who were engaged in the slave trade were severely handicapped if not put out of business entirely, while Jews who owned large estates that were worked primarily by Christian slave labor were so disadvantaged that they would have found difficulty in continuing to function. Sisebut's attempt to

prohibit Jews from hiring Christian laborers was probably aimed at keeping Jewish landowners from employing the newly freed men and maintaining business almost as usual.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Pages 9-10.

Bachrach concludes his other work, *A Reassessment of Visigothic Jewish Policy*, by saying:

...in the period from 589 to 711 at most seven of the Visigothic kings embraced anti-Jewish policies or encouraged anti-Jewish legislation. During this same period, however, no less than nine monarchs pursued policies that varied from benign neglect of the Jews to support of the Jews. Throughout the entire period those kings who pursued anti-Jewish policies faced strong opposition from both lay and ecclesiastical magnates as well as from the population at large. Furthermore, it was difficult and often impossible to enforce anti-Jewish laws because of their general unpopularity. In short, scholars have overestimated the power of the monarchs, put too much faith in the effectiveness of the Church councils, and grossly underestimated the importance and strength of the Jewish community. The Jews were a formidable force in a kingdom riddled by factionalism, fragmented by localism, and devoid of strong monarchical institutions. Visigothic monarchs who promulgated anti-Jewish laws and demanded the Church councils to do the same were seeking to weaken the Crown's political enemies. These monarchs were neither religious fanatics nor the pusillanimous instruments of pious bishops.

Bernard Bachrach. *A Reassessment of Visigothic Jewish Policy*. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1 Feb. 1973. Page 34.

I largely agree with Bachrach's assessment of Sisebut's political motivations. However, I do question how much opposition to anti-Jewish legislation there was within the general population. To my knowledge, there are no sources outlining exactly how the common people felt one way or another. The evidence in the sources might suggest that opposition was mostly the result of Jewish bribes and gifts to Nobles and Clerics. Bachrach and others may have derived an erroneous conclusion that this somehow indicates a general reflection of the larger populace. Strategically placed bribes within a political structure can result in wildly disproportionate power that does not reflect popular sentiment.

Regardless, there was a definite pattern of alternating pro-Jewish/anti-Jewish policies from Sisebut in 612 right up until the Muslim invasion in 711. Sisebut was succeeded by his son, Reccared II, who ruled for no more than a year, when he was overthrown or succeeded by the pro-Jewish Suinthila who Solomon Katz describes as "*a mild and just king*." He also says that

He permitted those Jews who had been forced to baptism by Sisebut to return openly to the Jewish faith, and those who had chosen exile to return to Spain. This accords with Swinthila's general policy of tolerance, and is attested for us by the Jewish historian of the sixteenth century, Joseph ha-Kohen. This information, it must be remembered, is not even remotely contemporary, but it may be derived from some good Jewish source now lost.

Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Page 13.

Curiously, on the same page, as more evidence of Sisebut's forced conversions and Suinthila's comparative tolerance, Katz cites the pseudo-isidore decretals of the ninth century:

Among the false decretals of the Pseudo-Isidore is found one issuing from a council of Seville. It demands that the Jews, who were forced to have their children baptized and who were substituting strange children for them, be watched. The decree is found with several other undoubtedly authentic decrees in the irreproachable part of the collection, in the series of councils called Hispana, which the compiler inserted without modification before the Ninth Council of Toledo.

If this portion of the decretals is authentic, as Katz claims, it does speak to the injustices against the Jews in Spain, but curiously it may also speak to some crimes of their own. Who were these strange children the Jews were presenting for baptism, and why did they Jews have access to them? One can only speculate. As for the mild and just nature of Suinthila, the king was praised by many of his time for crushing the Basque rebellions in the North, and for driving out the last of the Byzantines. In fact, in reprisal to the Basque rebellions, or raids, depending on your perspective, he forced them to build a town. Isidore of Seville recounts in his *Historia Gothorum* that:

At the beginning of his reign, Suinthila also launched an expedition against the Basques who had invaded the province of Tarraconensis. There the mountain peoples were struck with such terror at his coming that they immediately threw down their weapons and freed their hands for prayer, submitting their necks to him as suppliants and giving him hostages, as if aware of his rightful jurisdiction. They built the city of Ologicus for the Goths with their own taxes and labour, promising to be obedient to Suinthila's rule and dominion and to carry out whatever they were ordered to do.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 88.

Curiously, Katz and other historians have never thought to accuse Suinthila of being anti-Basque. The main difference in how Sisebut and Suinthila are viewed by many scholars seems to hinder on how each monarch himself viewed the Jews.

Regarding the character of Suinthila's reign, there is much contradiction in the sources. Isidore of Seville, who initially praised the pro-Jewish king, wrote in his *History of the Goths* that:

Beyond this reputation for military glory, there were in Suinthila many virtues of royal majesty: faith, prudence, industry, keen scrutiny in judicial matters, and a vigorous concern for government. He was generous to all in his munificence, and quite prompt in his mercy toward the poor and needy. He was thus not only the ruler of the people, but was also worthy to be called the father of the poor.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 88.

However, as Edward Thompson points out, Isidore was the first Bishop to sign the minutes of the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, two years after Suinthila was overthrown by Sisenand. These minutes condemned Suinthila and spoke of his "crimes", his "iniquity", and his "accumulation of property at the expense of the poor." Additionally, *The Chronicle of Fredegar*, a near contemporary Frankish source, treats Suinthila harshly and states that he had become a hated figure of Gothic nobles, because of his harsh confiscations of property which in 630 led to Sisenand's rebellion. (Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Pages 77-78)

Thompson also considers, however, the possibility that it may have been dangerous for Isidore of Seville to repeat his earlier praise under the new king Sisenand, and thus signed the minutes regardless of his true sentiments. (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969.

Pages 170-171) But it seems equally plausible that Isidore praised Suinthila while he sat on the throne out of fear. Suinthila may have murdered Sisebut's son, Reccared II, to acquire the throne.

It was decided at the 4th Council of Toledo that *“In the future, when a king died, his successor must be appointed by the magnates of the whole kingdom sitting along with the bishops in a common council.”* (Thompson. Page 174) Edward Thompson notes that Sisenand indeed had usurped the throne from Suinthila and says that “by recognizing Sisenand as king the Council contradicted the spirit of its own extraordinarily earnest enactment”, (Thompson. Page 174) but if the Clergy and Nobles had considered Suinthila the usurper of Sisebut’s son, Reccared II, who ruled for barely a year before being dethroned, then perhaps they were not contradicting themselves. Rodger Collins considers the fact that Reccared II was glossed over by Isidore of Seville in the latter’s *History of Gothic Kings*.

On his death Sisebut was succeeded by a son called Reccared. This choice of name is significant in itself, in that it would seem to proclaim some kind of relationship to the former royal house of Leovigild and his descendants. Isidore does his best to skirt over the reign of Reccared II, assigning it a length of “a few days, before death intervened.” In so doing he obscured the regnal chronology of the Visigothic monarchy in these years, and may well have covered up the young king’s real fate. At any rate, it seems that, however he met his end, he reigned for more than a few days, probably for a year and two to three months.

Rodger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Pages 76-77.

However, he acquired the throne, it seems entirely possible that Suinthila began his reign as a mild and just king, but finished it in the opposite manner. It’s of note that his own brother deserted him during the rebellion and defected to the other side. (E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 171-172) Also of note is that Isidore of Seville died shortly afterwards in 636, and may have simply not been able to get around to editing his entries on Suinthila in his *History of Gothic Kings*. Kenneth Baxter Wolf notes in his translations of Isidore’s texts that there are two versions.

Two versions of the *History* have survived. The short version, represented by only a few manuscripts, ends with the death of Sisebut in 621. The long version ends in the middle of Suinthila’s reign (625). There has been much discussion about which came first. Most regard the long version as an expansion of the original, short version. But some have argued that the short version represents an expurgation of the original, longer chronicle, from which all of the positive references to Suinthila were removed.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 12.

Putting Suinthila aside, Bernard Bachrach describes the anti-Jewish policies of his successor Sisenand:

Jews were once again prohibited from holding public offices in which they exercised power over Christians. In addition persons who were born of Jewish parents were also prohibited from holding such offices. Suinthila, in reversing Sisebut’s policy, had once again begun to use Jewish officials; Sisenand in returning to Sisebut’s policy sought to eliminate all Jewish officials in government. Officials who did not dismiss the Jews who had gained such public offices and officials who appointed Jews to positions of governmental power were liable to excommunication. Sisenand also struck at Jewish slave traders who dealt in Christian slaves and reaffirmed Sisebut’s legislation in these matters.

Sisenand tried to bring about the dejudification of the government, and he sought to weaken the fiscal strength of the Jewish community. Sisenand’s approach to purely religious matters was not innovative. He did, however, oppose forced conversions. Nevertheless, those who had converted were not permitted to apostatize, and Jewish proselytizing was handled in the traditional manner.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 12.

Interestingly, in order to overthrow Sisenand, Sisenand had sought the aid of Dagobert, the Frankish King to the North, who had recently concluded a treaty with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius in 629, which entailed compulsory baptism of Jews throughout his kingdom. Heraclius had been engaged in a bitter war against the Persians whom the Jews were supporting. 18th century British historian, Edward Gibbon, tells us that in 613 the Persian army took Damascus with the help of thousands of Jews whose “furious bigotry might compensate, in some degree, for the want of valor and discipline.” The Persians seized Jerusalem in 614 with the help of the Jews and Arabs. Gibbon writes that...

The sepulchre of Christ, and the stately churches of Helena and Constantine, were consumed, or at least damaged, by the flames; the devout offerings of three hundred years were rifled in one sacrilegious day; the Patriarch Zachariah, and the true cross, were transported into Persia; and the massacre of ninety thousand Christians is imputed to the Jews and Arabs, who swelled the disorder of the Persian march.

I’m not sure where Gibbon got the figure of 90,000, and it be may exaggerated, as most of the figures in antiquity were, but regardless there probably was a massacre of Christians, and afterwards, the Persians went on to capture Egypt in 617. (Edward Gibbon. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Pages. 908–909. Walter Kaegi writes in his book that “Recent urban unrest in Alexandria and Antioch, which included Jewish-Christian clashes at Antioch, contributed to internal instability.” (Walter Kaegi. *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*. Cambridge University Press. 2003. Page 55.) Greatrex and Lieu write in their book that “According to many sources, the Jews were heavily involved in the fighting, although whether as faction members or as opponents of Christians is unclear.” (Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu. *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars AD 363-628*. Taylor and Francis e-Library. 2005. Page 187) Jacob Neusner writes in his book, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, that there were some “60,000” Christians slaughtered, that the Iranians selected some “37,000” skilled Christian workmen for deportation to Iran and that “*according to the eyewitness account of Strategios, the Jews offered to ransom Christian captives if they would accept Judaism.*” (Jacob Neusner. *A History of Jews in Babylonia, V Later Sasanian Times*. E. J. Brill. 1970. Page 123)

The Jews, Arabs and Persians had become hostile to and were advancing on the known Christian world at the time. Why would Heraclius not begin targeting Jews throughout his sphere of influence, since they were openly hostile to him and Christians? From this it seems completely plausible that the anti-Jewish agenda of the Byzantines influenced that of Sisebut and Sisenand just as it had Dagobert. Despite the ongoing conflict between the Visigothic kingdom and Byzantium, Edward Thompson informs us that “Throughout the existence of the Byzantine province” from 552-624, “there must have been a great deal of movement both of officials and of correspondence between southern Spain and Constantinople.” He says:

...indeed in the letters written by the Patrician Caesarius and King Sisebut, we catch a glimpse of East Roman officials travelling to Byzantium in company with a Visigothic diplomat and returning safely. There were also semi-official visitors to the East, like Leander of Seville, who travelled to Byzantium.

Chapter Nine:

The Fourth Council of Toledo

In Amnon Linder's translation of the anti-Jewish canons of the Fourth Council, he notes that:

The council's legislation on the Jews is more extensive than that of Toledo III (ten canons compared to one) but it is also of a more innovative nature. While Toledo III reissued previously promulgated regulations, Toledo IV dealt with the entirely new situation created by the forced baptism imposed on the Jews of Spain by Sisebut (612-621), that is, the existence of crypto-Jews, formally baptized and recognized as Christians, alongside communities of non-baptized and openly practicing Jews.

Amnon Linder. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*. Wayne State University Press. 1997. Page 485.

Linder asserts that Crypto-Jewry was solely due to forced conversions. While I have little doubt that they contributed, and were perhaps even the main contributing factor, it's not entirely out of the question that some Jews had already begun converting willingly in an outward appearance, so that they might evade the laws forbidding them to own Christian slaves. Remember that, under Suinthila, the Jews were supposedly allowed to return to practicing Judaism openly, but technically the laws forbidding them to own Christian slaves remained in force.

Canon 64 of the Fourth Council under Sisenand proclaimed that Jewish converts to Christianity who deviated from the faith should not be admitted as witnesses in public courts.

One cannot be faithful toward men and stand unfaithful toward God; the Jews, therefore, who became Christians formerly and have now prevaricated against the faith of Christ must not be admitted to give evidence, even though they declare themselves to be Christians, because they are doubtful as regards human evidence just as they are suspect concerning the faith of Christ. It is proper, therefore, to invalidate the evidence of those found false in faith, and they must not be believed who have forsaken truth and faith.

Linder. Page 490.

While no one could blame a Jew who lied about his true faith after being forcibly converted, a Jew who had converted falsely of his own free will for economic gain, that is another matter. Again Suinthila, according to Katz and others, had allowed Jews to openly return to their faith, and at this point in 633, this may have been the norm for over a decade. The Fourth Council is speaking of Jews who claimed to be Christian under Suinthila's pro-Jewish policies despite evidence to the contrary.

From a purely pragmatic standpoint, it wouldn't have been altogether unreasonable to bar individuals known to have lied about their religious status for profit. If they were willing to lie about their religion, an extremely serious matter at the time, they might also be willing to bear false witness in the public courts, if it suited their purposes. Also note that the law does not bar all Jews or baptized Jews. Rather it only concerns itself with those converts whom evidence had shown to be unfaithful.

The next canon is admittedly not as forgiving. It returns to the policy of Sisebut and bars both Jews and Jewish converts from public offices, yet it may reveal how both parties were abusing these offices to punish Christians.

The Holy Council decreed as follows, on the command of the lord and most excellent Sisenand the King, that Jews and those who were formerly Jews should not seize public offices in any way, because they use this opportunity to harm Christians; the Judges of the provinces, together with the priests, shall therefore check their fraudulently neglected infiltration and shall not permit them to exercise public office. If anyone should permit them this jurisdiction, he shall be excommunicated as a sacrilegious, and the infiltrator shall be publicly flogged.

Linder. Page 491.

Many will claim here that the Jews of whom the Fourth Council speaks were acting in retribution for Sisebut's forced conversions, yet recall that the Third Council in 589 over 20 years before Sisebut had even assumed the throne, proclaimed that it was necessary that the Jews should not act "in any public office that would provide them with the opportunity to inflict punishment on Christians." (Linder. Page 485) The law promulgated in 589 suggests that this Jewish behavior may have been a problem even before the Visigoths even converted to Catholicism.

An additional question arises here. Why did Sisebut convert some Jews and not others? Virtually all the historians agree that there were baptised and non-baptised Jews living side by side within Spain during the reign of Suinthila. Perhaps, as it has been suggested already, some Jews left Spain and went to Gaul and later returned under Suinthila more liberal policies. Solomon Katz gives us his general overview of the Fourth Council and perhaps another possible answer to this question.

At the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) Sisenand decided that the Jews should not be forced to baptism, but he approved the harsh measure of the same council which stated that those who had been baptized under Sisebut and had returned to Judaism under Swinthila must be forced to return to the Catholic faith. This view was later accepted in canon law. The same council inaugurated legislation regarding baptized Jews whose orthodoxy was doubtful. These Jews were able, however, to bribe the priests to permit them to observe their own rites. This abuse became so widespread that the Fourth Council of Toledo was forced to enact ecclesiastical penalties against the venal clergy.

Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Page 13.

Katz frames the situation as if it were entirely a matter of permitting the Jews religious freedom. Yet the policies enacted at the Fourth Council were addressing Jewish behavior under the liberal policies of Suinthila, who again allowed them to practice their faith openly. The bribes to which Katz refers were likely used more so as a means to retain Christian slaves, circumvent the law and obtain preferential treatment. Moreover, even Sisebut was not originally intolerant of the Jewish faith. Recall that he said in 613 that the laws issued under Reccared "would be sufficient, if the depravity of the Jews had not afterwards corrupted the minds of princes, and they had not demanded and obtained benefits for themselves contrary to the principles of justice." (S.P. Scott. *The Visigothic Code*. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 369-370.) The laws under Reccared primarily consisted of three major stipulations. The Jews were not to own Christian slaves. They were not to take Christian women as mistresses or as concubines. Nor could they hold public offices with power over Christians, lest they punish them unjustly. Outside of this, they were free to do as they pleased.

Here's Linder's translation of the canon of the Fourth Council that pertains to Jewish bribes.

So great is the avarice of some people that, as the Apostle says, while they strive after it they will stray away even from the faith; even now, indeed, many of the priests and the laymen have received gifts from Jews and encourage, with their protection, the perfidy of those who are known (and not without reason) to be members of the Antichrist's body; for they act against Christ. Henceforth, therefore, any bishop, cleric, or layman who should provide them help against the Christian faith through favor and support, shall indeed be put under anathema as an impious and sacrilegious, and expelled out of the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of God; for it is proper that one who becomes defender of the enemies of Christ should be separated from the body of Christ.

Linder. Page 487.

Note that the law isn't expressly designed to attack Jews who are practicing their faith amongst themselves as they see fit. In fact, it's not even targeting Jews per se, but rather any Christians who protect Jews who are engaged in hostilities toward the Christian faith.

Curiously, the Fourth Council, does make clear attempts to measure their efforts against the Jewish community. As canon 61 states:

If baptized Jews should later prevaricate against Christ and stand condemned to a certain punishment, it is not proper that their faithful sons should be excluded from their parents' properties, for it is written: A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.

Linder. Page 489.

On the other hand, canon 60 stated that:

We decree that the sons and daughters of the Jews should be separated from the company of their parents in order that they should not become further entangled in their deviation, and entrusted either to monasteries or to Christian, God-fearing men and women, in order that they should learn from their way of life to venerate the faith and, educated on better things, progress in their morals as well as their faith.

Linder. Page 488.

Charles Joseph Hefele notes in volume four of his *History of the Church Councils* that other versions of the Latin text refer to 'baptized sons and daughters' of Jews. (Charles Joseph Hefele. *A History of the Church Councils*. Vol 4. Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark. 1895. Page 456) The canon in question is without doubt referring to the baptized children of Jewish parents who had either been forced to convert under Sisebut or who had converted falsely under Suinthila and then relapsed into Judaism. The preceding canon is expressly concerned with the matter.

Many who were formerly elevated from being Jews to the Christian faith are now blaspheming Christ, not only by being known to be practicing Jewish rites but even by daring to operate abominable circumcisions; concerning these men, the Holy Council decreed as follows, with the advice of the most pious and most religious prince our lord Sisenand the King, namely, that such transgressors should be reformed and recalled to the veneration of the Christian dogma by the episcopal authority, in order that the priestly chastisement should correct those whom their proper will shall not amend. Those, however, whom they will circumcise, if they are their sons, they shall be separated from their parents' company, and if slaves, they shall be given liberty in return for the injury done to their body.

Linder. Page 488.

It is curious that the Church viewed circumcision as a kind of child abuse, yet only deemed it appropriate to remove children whom they viewed as Christian at that point from parents whom they viewed as apostates at that point. Traditionally, the punishment in Judaism for apostasy was death. Deuteronomy 13; 6-11 states that apostates are to be stoned until they die and receive no pity.

While it is certainly tragic that children may have been separated from their parents under Sisenand, assuming the Jewish converts didn't substitute someone else's children in their stead, as the Pseudo-Isidore decretals may suggest, we should remember that a not-so-small number of Christian slaves probably had their foreskin forcibly removed at birth by their Jewish masters, and that the Christians had asked repeatedly that the Jews not do this.

Canon 63 addresses interfaith marriages again:

Jews who have Christian wives in marriage should be warned by the bishop of their city that if they wish to remain with them, they should become Christians. If they were warned and have refused, they shall be separated, because an infidel cannot remain united to one who has transferred to the Christian faith. The sons issued from such marriages, however, should follow the faith and status of the mother; similarly, also, those born to infidel wives and faithful men should follow the Christian religion, not the Jewish superstition.

Linder. Page 490.

Take note that the wording is primarily focused on Jewish men with Christian women, while it addresses a scenario of Jewish women with Christian men almost as a hypothetical. Again, the Jewish community likely would have stoned to death any Jewish woman caught with a Christian man.

The original Latin does not actually use the term wife, but 'mulier' which can also mean 'woman or mistress', depending on the context. The Latin 'vir' is its male counterpart, yet Linder translates the words "fidelibus viris" as "faithful men" and "infidelibus mulieribus" as "infidel wives," not 'infidel women.'

The term for marriage used here is "mulieres in coniugio," a term which may entail something more along the lines of a civic union, which curiously still would have been outlawed by the secular code, and more importantly, by Jewish law itself.

It is interesting that Linder in his initial commentary referred to the Fourth Council as being "of a more innovative nature." (Linder. Page 495.) Indeed, as the Jews insisted on violating earlier comparatively reasonable laws meant to protect the Christian community, laws largely paralleled within the Jewish community, the anti-Jewish legislation of the 7th century became more extensive, complex, and sometimes confused in appearance, as it tried to address what might be deemed Jewish intolerance and disrespect.

Chapter Ten:

Chintila's Fear of Usurpation

Upon Sisenand's natural death, he was succeeded by a noble named Chintila. Thompson tells us that "It is evident that, although he may have been the choice of the courtiers and the bishops, Chintila felt himself to be acutely menaced from the moment of his accession." In June of 636 Chintila convened the fifth Council of Toledo, which was primarily concerned with the problem of usurpation. Thompson informs us.

Excommunication was the penalty of those who inquired of soothsayers concerning the fate of the king or who cursed the king or who should form a party to support another with a view to making him king. Anyone aiming at the throne without being duly elected 'by all' and without noble Gothic birth was excommunicated and anathematized. This is a 'new cure' for a 'new sickness'; for the bishops explicitly asserted that men 'whose origin is no ornament' and 'whose virtue is no adornment' thought that they could indiscriminately ascend the throne...The bishops clearly imply that one or more than one Hispano-Roman of humble birth had aimed at the throne in the last year or two of Sisenand's reign or perhaps in the spring of 636; and their words suggest that this was a new phenomenon. The Fifth Council looks like a panic move by a king who at the earliest possible moment tried to protect himself, his family, and his *fideles* to the best of his feeble ability...

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 181.

The measures enacted by the fifth council, did not satisfy Chintila however, and a mere 18 months later, he convened the 6th council of Toledo. Thompson informs us again.

When the king died, no one was to usurp the throne, and no one might become king who was tonsured or decalvated or of servile origin or who belonged to a foreign race. Only a Goth might succeed to the throne...The Council dealt with men who, having been guilty of wrongdoing, took refuge among the enemy, gave them military aid, and so brought loss and damage to Spain. Such men, if they fell into the king's hands, were to be excommunicated...

...A solemn imprecation was called down upon those who might attack the king, dethrone him, usurp his position, or gather a band of conspirators against him. And the successor of a murdered king together with the entire Gothic people would be dishonoured above all other peoples of the earth if they did not punish the regicide as they would avenge the murder of their own father...

...That the cause of these frenzied repetitions was the outbreak of one or more rebellions against the throne is not a matter of conjecture: the revolts of Chintila's reign are mentioned in later times. In a law published in 642, less than two years after Chintila's death, King Chindasuinth, himself an old plotter and a hardened conspirator, refers to the problem of those who came to be called *refugae*, that is, men who went to foreign powers with a view to launching attacks on Spain from abroad. He goes on to lay down penalties upon all such men who had gone abroad from the time of Chintila.

Thompson. Page 183.

When the Sixth Council was in session, a deacon arrived from Rome with a letter from Pope Honorius I, who urged the Spanish bishops to be more robust in crushing the 'unbelievers', by which term, he probably meant the Jews. The Pope's original letter has been lost, but the response of a bishop named Braulio survives. Honorius had referred to the Spanish Bishops as "dumb dogs" who "cannot bark." (Thompson. Page 184.) Braulio recognizes the primacy of the Pope in Rome, but fires back against his accusations.

Since I don't have access to the letter, I'll quote Thompson who relays what Braulio told the Pope. The Bishops...

...were proceeding slowly on purpose, not because of negligence or fear: they were subduing the native hardness of the Jews by constant preaching. The criticisms that Honorius had made of them were unfair. The words of Isaiah 56: 10 about 'dumb dogs' could not in fact apply to the bishops of Spain. In support of their argument they were now sending to Honorius the acts of their Council together with canons 57-66 of the Fourth Council. Braulio then passed over to the offensive. The Pope must not be misled by false rumours: the bishops of Spain had not been deceived by the report, which had reached them, that the venerable prince of Rome had himself allowed baptized Jews to revert to their old superstition. They would therefore urge the Pope to press on and to bring into the bosom of Mother Church the enemies of the Cross of Christ. After asking for Honorius's prayers, Braulio ends solemnly by saying that men guilty of any crime whatsoever should not be struck with so severe a punishment as the Pope had suggested: such a penalty was supported neither by the canons of our ancestors nor by the pages of the New Testament. Evidently Honorius had suggested a treatment for the Jews at which even the Spanish bishops blenched.

Braulio has often been admired for the sturdy independence of this composition. But, of course, it is the letter of one persecutor to another. On the fundamental issue of penalizing the Jews there is no difference of opinion between the Pope and the bishops of Spain. The question is simply one of the degree of rigour with which the persecution is to be enforced and its victims coerced.

The acts of the Council, of which they sent a copy to Honorius, included one canon relating to the Jews. In it the bishops applauded Chintila's desire to eradicate the Jewish superstition completely and to permit no non-Catholic to live in the kingdom. This is an innovation in the history of Western Europe. Nothing like it had been known in the Western Roman Empire or in the Arian kingdom of Spain. Even Sisebut had not gone so far. The new policy clearly originated with Chintila, not with the bishops. But now the bishops joined with all the optimates and 'illustrious men' in declaring that all future kings before ascending the throne must swear an oath that they would not allow the Jews to violate the Catholic faith and would not be led by indifference or bribes to show favour to the unbelievers. Any who acted otherwise would be anathema maranatha in the sight of the Everlasting God and would become fuel for the Eternal Fire. The Spanish bishops ended by confirming the anti-Jewish enactments of the Fourth Council.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press 1969. Pages 184-185.

I have to ask here if Thompson considers the Jews to be a persecutor of sorts as well and the Christians slaves whom they circumcised, their victims? That said, it's hard to disagree with Thompson that the 6th Council of Toledo was indeed unprecedented. Chintila outright forbade anyone but Catholics to live in Spain, and the Church supported the notion entirely. The third canon states clearly that Chintila "decided, together with the priests of his kingdom, to eradicate entirely [Jewish] prevarications and superstitions, nor does he allow anyone who is not Catholic to live in his kingdom." (Amnon Linder. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*. Wayne State University Press. 1997. Page 493.)

Solomon Katz brings up some additional points. He says that the acts of the council themselves may have resulted from the interference of Pope Honorius, who as previously mentioned, requested the clergy to crush the "unbelievers." The Latin term in the letter used to refer to the people in question was "perfidii" and was not exclusive to Jews. It could refer to anyone who was treasonous, treacherous, unfaithful or who broke promises. Katz notes that another historian, Langen "believes that the pope referred to the Arians, but in 638 the Arian heresy no longer existed in Spain." Katz goes on to note that the Jews are not expressly mentioned in Braulio's letter to Honorius, but says:

The placitum to which the Jews were forced to subscribe seems to bear out this view. Many of them adopted baptism and signed a placitum, by which they bound themselves to observe all the Christian rites. The others chose exile. Tulga (640-641), who was as fanatical as Chintila, must have followed the same policy toward the Jews.

I think Katz is probably right that Honorius was referring to the Jews, but a few things are important to note here. The 6th Council is in many ways confused in appearance. The Bishops clearly state that only Catholics can live in Spain, but they also repeatedly cite the 4th Council which condemned forced conversions. In fact, in the same canon in which Chintila states that only Catholics can live in Spain, they state in reference to the 4th Council that:

...we have decided to confirm what was formerly decreed on the Jews in the general synod, for we know that everything necessary for their salvation that could be decreed was provided in that synod; and we resolve, therefore, that what was then decreed should be valid in future.

Linder. Page 494.

The Jews of Toledo who signed the Placitum at the 6th Council were probably those Jews forcibly baptised under Sisebut but who had relapsed into Judaism under Suinthila and Sisenand. Not that this justifies it, but the distinction is important to make since it reflects the logic the Church was following at the time. Jews were not to be forced to convert, but those who had been converted under Sisebut were to remain Christian. Of course, on the other hand, the choice facing non-baptised Jews was clear. Convert or leave Spain. Even so, it needs to be stressed that the Jews technically weren't forced to do anything. They were given an unfavorable ultimatum, yes, but this was no different than what they had done to the Idumeans and Itureans in the land of Canaan.

While Chintila and the Catholic Bishops here were intolerant, we should view their behavior as a response to perpetual Jewish intolerance. The Jews, since the time of Reccared, had refused to honor otherwise reasonable Catholic requests, mainly that they not remove peoples' foreskin against their will or enslave Christians. While we can disagree with how Sisebut, Sisenand and Chintila responded, we can hardly fault them for their desire to do something, unless we believe that the Jews had a divine right to enslave Christians, circumcise them at will, and have their way with Christian women under their domain.

While he may have been "fanatical" in religious matters, Chintila certainly was not paranoid or delusional in his perception of threats to the kingdom.

Thompson notes that at the 5th Council...

...only twenty-four bishops signed the minutes in person or by proxy. In one striking way the Fifth Council is almost unique among the Church assemblies of seventh-century Spain: the bishops of Gallia Narbonensis were not present. The acts specifically refer to this Council as a meeting of 'bishops from the various provinces of Spain'. There is no comment and no explanation. Can it be that Septimania was in revolt (as it was later to be in Wamba's time) and that the danger which threatened Chintila came from the north? Perhaps it is no coincidence that Chintila and Wamba, alone of the seventh-century kings, minted no coins in Narbonensis.

Thompson informs us that at the 6th Council...

...fifty-three bishops hastened to the capital, and on this occasion they referred to themselves as the 'bishops of Spain and Gaul', and three Gallic bishops (Narbonne, Elne, Lodeve) were present.

Perhaps this is evidence that Chintila had defeated a rebellion in Septimania and Narbonensis, which had impeded the presence of these Bishops at the previous Council. Note that these regions were well known for their Jewish elements, and that the Jews had supposedly fled North to Gaul under Sisebut to evade Baptism. While there is no record of Jewish involvement in a rebellion against Chintila, they were definitely involved in one against King Wamba later in 672. The Jews would have had a clear motive to support any attempt to depose a “fanatical” king unwilling to accept their bribes meant to gain *“benefits for themselves contrary to the principles of justice.”*

Chapter Eleven:

Chindasuinth's Persecution of Goths

Following the 6th Council, Chintila reigned for only another year before he died in 639. He was succeeded by his son Tulga, of whom little is actually known since he was almost immediately overthrown by Chindasuinth who implemented a pro-Jewish policy. Bachrach summarizes and contextualizes the sequence of successions from Sisebut to Chindasuinth:

Suinthila, after succeeding the anti-Jewish Sisebut - perhaps by murdering his son - pursued a pro-Jewish policy, and Sisenand after overthrowing Suinthila pursued an anti-Jewish policy. At least some of the revolts against Sisenand were led by those who were supporters of Suinthila's policies. A supporter of Sisenand, Chintila pursued his predecessor's anti-Jewish policies, and there were revolts against Chintila as well. Tulga, Chintila's son, was overthrown by Chindasuinth, who pursued a pro-Jewish policy.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 14.

Solomon Katz supports the notion that Chindasuinth was pro-Jewish although he doesn't use that term:

Chindasuinth promulgated only one law against judaizing Christians. Baptized Jews and those who had not been baptized he seems to have left undisturbed. The Seventh Council of Toledo which he convoked passed no anti-Jewish measures. Encouraged by this, many of the baptized Jews must have returned to the Jewish faith, and some of the exiles must have returned to the Visigothic kingdom, for there is mention of them under Receswinth.

Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Pages 14-15

Most shocking of Chindasuinth's reign is that after seizing the throne, he killed several hundred Gothic nobles who had either opposed him or who had rebelled against others in the past. This fact should be stressed, for while many kings were anti-Jewish, there is no record of them slaughtering Jews like this. Thompson discusses the information obtained from the Chronicle of Fredegar.

Fredegar observes that the Gothic race becomes restless when it has not a strong yoke upon its back; and, true to custom, the turbulence that characterized Chintila's reign continued under Tulga. Eventually, one of the nobles, a vigorous man some 79 years old, called Chindasuinth, gathered together at a place called Pampilica several of the 'senators' of the Goths and a number of the people; and in defiance of so many episcopal imprecations he proclaimed himself king. In April 642, the year in which the Arabs first occupied Alexandria, he dethroned Tulga and tonsured him, thus making him ineligible under canon 17 of the Sixth Council to rule over Spain.

The slaughter and the confiscation of property went on through much of his reign. No fewer than 200 Gothic optimates and 500 mediogres (as Fredegar calls them) were put to death. It was said that 'he demolished the Goths'. A coin of his that was minted at Merida, the capital of Lusitania, with the legend VICTOR, has been taken to imply a military success in that region; and if that is a correct interpretation Chindasuinth actually undertook a military campaign against some of his rivals in that province.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Pages 190-191.

Upon Chindasuinth's death, his son Recceswinth assumed the throne, and in typical fashion at this point, he was immediately threatened by a rebellion. This time, it was a Basque uprising led by a Gothic noble named Froya. Thompson tells us that Froya "caused widespread devastation in northern Spain. An innumerable multitude of prisoners was led away, immense spoils were

taken, and the loss of life even among the clergy was heavy. Churches were desecrated and altars were destroyed by the insurgents. Saragossa was besieged, and the inhabitants waited anxiously for the arrival of the King." (Thompson. Page 200.) Eventually, Reccesuinth showed up with an army and crushed the rebellion, killing Froya in the process.

As Thompson notes, it was precisely the kind of Rebellion that the Church and previous kings had aimed to stop with their imprecations, canons and laws, and yet curiously, Reccesuinth asked the Clergy to allow him to grant leniency to the traitors. After much debate, the Clergy allowed it. Concerning the Basques, as Henry Bradley stated in his book, they "obtained redress of their grievances, and were thenceforward content to accept the rule of the Gothic king." (Henry Bradley. The Story of the Goths. Page 340.) Indeed, the rest of his reign was marked by undisturbed peace, until his natural death in 672.

Reccesuinth, despite his father's pro-Jewish stance, turned out to be the most anti-Jewish king yet. At the Eighth Council of Toledo in 653, Reccesuinth denounced the Jews and said some of the following:

I denounce, indeed, both the life-style and the customs of the Jews, whose pestilential contagion alone still pollutes the land under my new rule. For while God the Omnipotent eradicated completely from this land all heresies, it is obvious that only this vile sacrilege still remains, to be reformed by the insistence of our devotion or destroyed by its vindictive punishment. I observe some of them to maintain their ancient perfidy in their customary deviation, while others, cleansed in the holy baptismal ablution, so relapse into the deviation of apostasy, to my utter pain, that their blasphemous profanation should be seen as far more detestable than that of those who have not yet been purified in the water of the sacred regeneration.

Amnon Linder. The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages. Wayne State University Press. 1997. Pages 501-502.

This is an extreme and remarkable change in attitude, considering the tendency of sons to emulate their fathers. It's rendered more remarkable still, if the Jews had indeed been valuable allies to his father, which is admittedly a somewhat conjectural assertion.

As to why Reccesuinth reversed his father's pro-Jewish policies, many claims have been made, but here is Bachrach's analysis.

In trying to ascertain why Reccesuinth reversed his father's policies concerning the Jews, scholars like Katz have labeled him "fanatical in the extreme." Yet the continuator of Isidore's chronical writing not long after the king's death characterized him as "easy-going" and "debauched." These are hardly the virtues commonly associated with a religious fanatic. If, however, we view Reccesuinth's change of his father's Jewish policy in its political context, there is little need to resort to such characterizations. For example, Reccesuinth reversed his father's policy concerning the supporters of Chintila and Tulga. Whereas Chindasuinth ruthlessly crushed this group, Reccesuinth granted pardons. He favored men whom his father had driven out, men who had helped to formulate and enforce Chintila's anti-Jewish policy.

On the same page, Bachrach describes Reccesuinth's reign stating that...

...at his urging the acta concerning Jews passed at the Fourth Council were reaffirmed. Reccesuinth, however, went further in pursuing an anti-Jewish policy. First, he enacted ten laws concerning Jews, and these appeared in the new code. The thrust of these laws was to make it impossible for a Jew to remain in Spain. Anyone who practiced Jewish rites or celebrated Jewish rituals was to be executed. Some scholars have suggested that a distinction can be made between practicing and non-practicing Jews, and thus they conclude that it was a capital crime only to be a practicing Jew. Other scholars have noted, however, that Reccesuinth's laws explicitly point out that anyone who "in his heart" had even the slightest doubt about the Catholic faith must go into exile. Second, Reccesuinth decreed that all preexisting anti-Jewish laws not explicitly

repealed were to be enforced. Thus Chintila's law that all Jews either must convert or go into exile was still in force. It seems reasonable to agree with Parkes who concludes: "Without saying so in so many words, Reccesuinth forced all Jews who remained in Spain to accept conversion."

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 16.

While I think Parks was correct, it's just as valid to assert that 'without saying so in so many words, the Jews had told the Visigoths that they were going to do to Christians whatever they wanted whenever they wanted, regardless of any objections.' The additions to the secular code enacted under Reccesuinth address this to a degree. Under section XIV, pertaining to the circumcision of Christians and the retention of Christians slaves, the Visigoths state the following:

We provide for the health and safety of our subjects, and of all other persons within the provinces of our kingdom, when we rescue the adherents of our religion from the hands of infidels. For, by this means, the orthodox faith will be greatly exalted, when the execrable perfidy of the Jews shall no longer have power over Christians. The fatal control of Jews over Christians should therefore be abominated, and consecrated by the favor of God brought under the influence of Divine Love.

S.P. Scott. *The Visigothic Code*. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 371.

With this in mind, Solomon Katz notes that despite their rigorous conviction these laws utterly failed again, due to bribes and corruption.

Receswinth thought that the Jews, oppressed and without civil or religious privileges, would become Christians. His optimism was ill-founded; new measures had to be taken to prevent the Jews from evading the laws. He decreed that persons, priests, nobles, or others who aided and protected Jews, whether baptized or not, in the practice of their cult, would suffer the confiscation of a quarter of their property and excommunication.

The Ninth Council of Toledo (655) under Receswinth was forced to consider this abuse. Non-baptized Jews were practicing their own rites, with the aid of the Christian clergy, and dared even to circumcise their Christian slaves. On the last point the Tenth Council (656), again under Receswinth, was obliged to demonstrate to the Jews and their accomplices that they must not possess Christian slaves. This legislation continued to weigh heavily upon the Jews during the reign of Wamba (672-680). When Hilderic, governor of Nîmes, revolted against Wamba and promised the Jews religious freedom in his province, many of them hastened there. Paul, who had been sent by Wamba to crush the insurrection, joined with the rebels and protected the Jews.' After putting down the revolt, Wamba expelled the Jews from Narbonne and probably also from the whole province of Septimania. The Jews were not made the objects of any special measures during the reign of Wamba, nor did the Eleventh Council of Toledo concern itself with them. We cannot assume, however, that the laws against them were being observed or that there were no Jews left in the kingdom, inasmuch as new measures were passed by the next king.

Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Pages 16-17.

Insofar that Katz and others frame this as a question of religious freedom, I would rhetorically ask here if Hilderic's religious freedom promised to the Jews included the right to hold Christian slaves and circumcise them? The 7th canon at the 10th Council indeed speaks to how Christian slaves were knowingly sold to Jews who would in turn force them to conform to Jewish religious rites under their ownership. It states that...

...the very same people who should have redeemed endeavor to carry out sales of those whom they already know to be redeemed by the blood of Christ, in such a way, indeed, that they are forced to convert to the rite of Judaism under the ownership of their buyers and an execrable traffic is thus carried out...

Amnon Linder. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*. Wayne State University Press. 1997. Page 509.

Once again, I feel the need to highlight that by now, almost 100 years had passed since Reccared's 3rd Council, and yet the Jews continued to own Christian slaves and circumcise them. What's more is that they did this, despite numerous legal privileges afforded to them by Christians.

Around the year 400, St Augustine, one of the most influential figures of Catholic theology, preached that the Jews must be protected for their ability to explain the Old Testament. During the late 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great, in a series of epistles, which later became the foundation of Catholic doctrine concerning the Jews, he specified that Christians should be obligated to protect the Jews as they were an important part of Christian civilization. Jews were to be treated equitably and justly. Their property rights were to be protected, and their own festivals and religious practices were to be respected.

To a certain extent, Gregory pursued the rights of Jews to exclusion of the rights of Christians. Bachrach points out that in Italy, during the early 7th century, Pope Gregory...

...permitted the flourishing Jewish slave trade to continue by making allowances for Jewish merchants who "accidentally" acquired Christian slaves. The pope made it clear that he did not want Jewish slave dealers to be disadvantaged because of "ignorance" or "accident." Gregory knew that imperial officials were involved with Jews in encouraging the slave trade, and thus Jews who were found to have Christian slaves among their stock were permitted forty days to sell their contraband. Obviously this restriction, even if it were enforced, would do little to hinder business. Gregory also pursued a policy consistent with the Theodosian Code, but prohibited by Justinian's legislation, to the effect that Jewish ownership of Christian agricultural slaves was tolerated as long as the latter were permitted to practice their religion without molestation. Finally Gregory allowed landed Jewish magnates to retain Christian coloni on their latifundia in violation of the laws that prohibited Christians from being under the power of Jews.

Although Gregory admonished ecclesiastical officials who permitted Jews to perpetrate flagrant violations of the Roman law to the gross disadvantage of Christians, he took special care to act on behalf of Jews who gave even the appearance of being wronged. For example, he looked after the interests of a Jewish ship owner who claimed that officials had wrongly confiscated his vessel and saw to it that a Jewish moneylender was not deprived of what was due him. In yet another case Gregory declared that since it was illegal for Christian slaves to work and live in the home of a Jew, it was permissible for the Jews to use Christian domestic slaves who "lived out."

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Pages 36-37.

Consider also that in 525 the Jews of Ravenna were charged with having ridiculed Christians and with having thrown them and their holy water into the river. A mob of Christians retaliated by burning their synagogues. Curiously though, Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king, then ordered that the entire Roman population of the city be taxed for the purpose of rebuilding the synagogues that had been burned. The Christians who could not pay the tax were to be whipped through the streets as punishment. (Bachrach. Pages 30-31)

Bachrach also tells us that...

At about the same time as the trouble in Ravenna, the Jews of Milan complained to Theodoric that they had been the victims of unwarranted violence and that their privilegia were not being respected. The king ordered that no ecclesiastic might infringe upon the privileges of the Jews nor concern himself with the internal affairs of the Jewish community.

Bachrach. Page 31.

While one could look at this as evidence of Jewish persecution, another equally legitimate perspective is that the Jews clearly felt that Theodoric and others in the government were receptive to honoring their Jewish privileges. Imagine a scene today in America, wherein a group of White Christians voiced concerns to Donald Trump that their “White privileges” were not being respected. Then imagine that Donald Trump ordered that the Marxists could not infringe upon the privileges of White Christians nor concern themselves with the internal affairs of White Rural America.

Andrew Sharf, in his chapter on Jews in 5th century Byzantium remarks that “the civil status of the Jews became identical with that of every other race and nation ruled by Rome.” He says that these rights were mostly retained and that “this situation was not only the result of incorporating pre-Christian enactments into a Christian code. It was also deliberate Christian policy.” Christians he says...

...had not only to permit Judaism but, in a society of law and order, could not but protect its institutions. First of all, circumcision continued to be permitted. This had been an exceptional Jewish privilege in Roman law, which normally associated circumcision with castration, an illegal mutilation attracting the death penalty and confiscation of property. Next, both Codes declared synagogues to be legally recognized places of worship, and protected from violence or desecration. If a synagogue had been seized, it was to be returned. If it had been consecrated for use as a church, the community was to be compensated by a sum of money and, if judged necessary, by a building plot suitable for erecting another. Just as the synagogue was recognized, so were Jewish courts of law. Their decisions in civil cases between Jews had full legal force and were to be executed by the imperial magistrates as though they were their own. The Jew was protected in his daily life. He could not be forced to desecrate his sabbath or his festivals. A non-Jew could not fix the price of the goods a Jew offered for sale. A non Jew could not be directly in charge of Jews at work.

Andrew Sharf. Byzantine Jewry: From Justinian to the Fourth Crusade. Routledge & Kegan Paul London. 1971. Pages 20-21.

While Sharf is not discussing 7th century Spain directly, his commentary is still worth sharing here, since the Jews being denied the ability to hire Christians has been seen as a form of punishment and persecution. The Christians themselves apparently in some parts of the world had to conform with Jewish law and thereby were not allowed to be directly in charge of Jews while they worked.

Chapter Twelve:

The Rebellion Against Wamba

When Reccesuinth died naturally in 672, he was succeeded by Wamba, a man of some prominence from another noble Gothic family. According to Julian of Toledo's *Historiae Wambae Regis*, despite his advanced age, Wamba had the support of the Clergy, the common folk and Gothic nobility. An English translation of Julian's account illustrates the point:

Now he claims that he will not take office with so many disasters impending, and now he argues that he is worn out by age. He is resisting fiercely when one of the commanders, as if about to act for everyone else, stands in the middle of the crowd and, fixing him with a threatening expression says: "Know that unless you consent to our wishes you will be cut down by the blade of my sword. Indeed, we will not leave before either our nation has received you as king or else, refusing, you have been swallowed by a bloody death today."

Joaquin Martinez Pizarro. *The Story of Wamba*. The Catholic University of America Press. 2005. Pages 180-181.

While this seems downright bizarre, it is this very fact that makes me believe it. Having a Gothic noble threaten to kill Wamba would hardly be the first scene most historians or chroniclers would conjure up, if they had revisionism in mind.

As it turns out the author, Julian of Toledo, was of a Jewish background himself. His parents had converted to Catholicism, probably during the time of Chintila and raised him to be very anti-Jewish. Rodger Collins refers to Julian as "the most fervent or fanatical of all the churchmen of the Visigothic period in his anti-Jewish writings and activities." (Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain* 409-711. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 103.) The *Chronicle of 754* refers to Julian as "descended from Jewish stock" and that he "like a rose blossom amidst the thorns, shone throughout the world for his understanding of Christian doctrine."

To cite Bernard Bachrach's work again:

Julian, the archbishop of Toledo (680-690), maintained that the Jews in Gaul were not persecuted and lamented that Gaul was "*a brothel of blaspheming Jews*." In the revolt against Wamba, the only such episode about which we are relatively well informed, the Jews played an important political and military role; Duke Paul chose the city for his coronation and capital. This time, however, the Jews did not support the royal faction. Wamba had been the legitimate successor of Reccesuinth, and the Jews probably expected him to carry on his predecessor's anti-Jewish policy when they followed their apparent self-interest and opposed him. The military action taken by the Jews of Narbonne reinforces the impression that "la force de l'argent" was not the only power wielded by the Jewish faction in Visigothic politics. Wamba, however, was not a religious fanatic, and his appreciation of the power of the Jewish community apparently led him to a rapprochement with them. The Jews of Narbonne were allowed to return to their city, where for a long time afterward they continued to be a dominant force. Wamba in addition did not enforce the existing anti-Jewish laws, and at the councils that met during his reign the Jewish question was not discussed.

Bernard Bachrach. *Visigothic Jewish Policy*. Oxford University Press. 1977. Page 26.

Coincidentally, Jewish communities within the same region had supported the Frankish conquest against the Visigoths in the early 6th century as well. Bachrach informs us again:

In 508 when the Merovingians laid siege to Arles, the Jews who garrisoned a part of the city planned to hand over the defenses to Clovis's forces. That the Jews of Arles should prefer the dominance of the Orthodox Clovis to the dominance of the Arian Visigoths suggests that the Frankish

ruler had not gained an anti-Jewish reputation during the preceding decade of conquest. In fact, the preference of the Jews of Arles for Clovis may suggest that he had been overtly pro-Jewish.

Bernard Bachrach. Visigothic Jewish Policy. Oxford University Press. 1977. Pages 44-45.

(You can read Solomon Katz's doubts about the validity of this Jewish betrayal at the siege of Arles on page 114 of his book. Caesarius, the city's bishop, had been accused of treason by the local Jews, but was acquitted after a letter written by a Jewish soldier charged with the defense of a certain wall was discovered by a Visigothic soldier on patrol outside the walls. The letter informed the Franks of a spot on the wall where they might be able to climb and penetrate the city. The agreement was that the Jews were to be spared.)

The revolt against Wamba involved the Franks and the Jews yet again, but Wamba is recorded to have crushed the revolt. However, just as his predecessor Reccesuinth had done before him, Wamba treated the vanquished with remarkable mercy and restraint. The spirit of rebellion had broken out within the besieged city of Nimes, where Paul and the other conspirators were making their final stand. Julian of Toledo tells us that distrust ran rampant and everyone began killing each other to the dismay of Paul. A bishop rode out to meet Wamba and begged him to show mercy upon the devastated city. Not only did Wamba show mercy, but before returning to Toledo, he had the dead buried and the city rebuilt. Paul and the other Gothic leaders of the rebellion were decalvated and exiled, rather than killed. The Franks involved were sent home. The Jews of the city were initially banished, as Katz mentioned earlier, but Wamba eventually allowed them to return.

Later in his reign, according to the Chronicle of Alfonso, 270 Arab ships attacked the coast of Hispania, but Wamba was successful in repelling them as well. Historians argue, however, that a single attack of this size is doubtful, since no other source mentions it. At the time, indeed, the Arabs were already rolling over most of North Africa, but this would have been too early for them to be attacking Spain directly. While The Chronicle of 754 does say that the Moors "had long been raiding" southern Spain "and simultaneously devastating many cities"; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, its most recent translator, claims that this refers to the year before the defeat of King Roderic by the Moors, over three decades after Wamba's reign.

Chapter Thirteen:

Erwig's Conspiracy Against Wamba

Although there is a debate as to the exact nature of it, most scholars and historians agree that Wamba was deposed via a court conspiracy. Count Erwig was the probable perpetrator, and Julian of Toledo may have supported him. The 12th council in 681 records that Wamba fell ill and supposedly undertook the state of penitence, since it was thought he would die. Taking penitence during this period could only be done once in a person's life, and according to legal precedent, doing so disqualified a monarch from remaining on the throne.

Thompson informs us on what happened in more detail.

Accordingly, in a document which [Wamba] was able to sign with his own hand, he nominated the Count Erwig as his successor, an action that was sharply contrary to the canons of the Church. This document, which the bishops at the Twelfth Council one by one examined with close attention, was witnessed by the seniores who were present when he signed it. He also composed another document; and this, too, was produced for inspection by the bishops at the Twelfth Council. It was addressed to Julian of Toledo, who had now been Metropolitan for more than eight months, and directed him to anoint Erwig as soon as possible....

...There is evidence that Wamba protested strongly that he was not barred from reascending the throne; but his opposition was overruled. The truth is that canon law, if strictly applied, prohibited him from resuming the throne, and it is no coincidence that in 642 Chindasuinth had tonsured Tulga when he deposed him. But, if the nobility and the bishops had wanted Wamba to continue his reign, the law could easily have been waived. The events were strange, and Erwig undoubtedly expected that contemporaries would find them suspicious. In order to anticipate accusations, we may suppose, he and the bishops thought it important to set out as solemnly as possible their version of what had happened; and in the tome which he handed to the Twelfth Council Erwig urged the bishops to publish the facts.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Pages 230-231.

The Chronicle of Alfonso, written over 200 years later, claims that Wamba had been poisoned by Erwig. Roger Collins, however, points out that the Chronicle of 754 makes no mention of this, and in fact, it "passes over the succession of Erwig to Wamba without comment." (Roger Collins.

Visigothic Spain 409-711. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 97.) Moreover, he asserts that "Wamba must have been sufficiently sound in both mind and body to have signed the two documents that they recorded they had inspected and authenticated." (Collins. Page 99.)

For this reason, Collins calls the The Chronicle of Alfonso's claim that Wamba was poisoned "nonsensical." (Collins. Page 99.) But curiously, what the Chronicle of Alfonso actually says is that Erwig gave Wamba...

...an herb called spartus to drink and immediately Wamba's memory was taken away. When the bishop of the city and the nobles of the palace who were faithful to the king, ignorant of the workings of the potion, saw the king prostrate and without his memory, they were moved out of

piety to administer immediately the order of confession and penance, lest the king die outside of the order of penance. When the king recovered from the potion and understood what had happened, he went straight to a monastery.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 130.

Charles Joseph Hefele in Volume Five of his *History of the Church Councils* says that “Ervig, a very able man but extremely ambitious, made an effort to reach the throne, and brought to the old King, October 14, 680, a bad draught, to deprive him, not of life, but of reason.” (Charles Joseph Hefele. *A History of the Church Councils*. Vol 4. Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark. 1895. Page 207) Hefele wrote this in the 19th century and was probably basing his opinion on the same sources as Collins, but it’s a reasonable interpretation of the events. The Bishops and the nobles would have needed to speak with Wamba in order to ascertain that he had lost his memory. Thus the context suggests that Wamba was able to speak and communicate, at least to some extent. Perhaps his altered mental state allowed Julian and Erwig to coerce him into signing a series of documents the extent of which, Wamba had no real understanding. As far as the Palatines who were present when he signed these documents, it seems unlikely that they would have been suspect of anything, since Wamba was an old man. They probably figured he was having a stroke.

The second canon is almost comically titled “On those who receive penitence when they are without sense.” (Juan Tejada y Ramiro. *Colección de cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia de España y de América, en latín y castellano*, Tomo II. Imprenta de D. Pedro Montero. 1864. Page 459.) It does not mention Wamba by name, but it speaks of the many people who are ungrateful for the penitence they receive while in a compromised mental state, and later recover. It states that if anyone after being admitted to a state of penitence seeks to violate this conciliar institution, they shall be punished as transgressors of the paternal principles. Curiously, it also says that any priest who thenceforth gave penitence with reckless audacity to a person without sense, or who did not request it, would be excommunicated for one year, if he could not prove that the person had displayed either with their hands or by some other movement, a gesture of willingness.

Despite his concerns over the historicity of the *Chronicle of Alfonso*, even Collins agrees that there were a number of other irregularities surrounding the succession. He highlights that “a detailed regnal list of the late seventh-century, which its editor called the *Chronica regum Visigothorum*” makes it clear that “Wamba’s receiving penance preceded the proclamation of Ervig as king by a matter of only a few hours.” (Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 99) Moreover, legal precedent prohibited the king from choosing his successor. Wamba himself had been crowned king expressly by the consent of a Council and this was something Julian of Toledo had exalted in his writings. Yet Wamba’s election of Erwig as his successor is “the key element” in Erwig’s accession to the throne. (Collins. Page 98) It’s also suspicious that Erwig later readmitted to royal favor many of the nobles who had rebelled against Wamba and whom Wamba had not pardoned. Erwig restored their confiscated property and their right to give legal testimony. (Collins. Page 95)

The Chronicle of Alfonso also says that Erwig's father was not a Goth, but rather a Byzantine named Ardabastus, who had fled to Hispania after being expelled from Greece. For what reason, the Chronicle doesn't say, though Chindasuinth apparently "received him magnificently and gave to him his niece in marriage." (Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*.

Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 130.) If this account is correct, then Erwig was closely related to Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth, although I can't see how this gives any additional explanatory power to the plot. There doesn't seem to be any evidence that the families of Wamba and Reccesuinth were rivals, prior to this incident.

Julian of Toledo's motivations are attributed to concerns over the primacy of Toledo in religious matters. As Collins writes...

...Under Wamba, whose legitimacy Julian had so eloquently argued in his *Historia*, the position of the see of Toledo was weakened by the king's decision to create new dioceses. One of these was established in Lusitania, centered on the monastery of Aquis (modern Chaves), the place of burial of an otherwise unknown martyr called Pimenius. The other new see, far more extraordinarily, was created in the *urbs regia* of Toledo itself, where the "Praetorian Church of Saints Peter and Paul in the suburb of the city" was placed in the hands of a new bishop. We know of these creations only from the acts of the Twelfth Council of Toledo of January 681, which abolished both of them. Wamba was here blamed by name for these "foolish and unjust" creations, and was accused of violence in forcing them through against strong objections. As this was the king whose removal from the throne had just been so closely scrutinized by the bishops, it is clear that some of them at least were mightily relieved to see the back of him, and moved at once to suppress what they regarded as his illicit acts.

Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 100.

Once he was on the throne, Erwig not only reaffirmed the anti-Jewish laws enacted under Reccesuinth, but he enacted an additional 28 laws. These varied in nature, but many were expressly hostile to the Jewish culture itself. Laws III, IV and V forbade the celebration of Jewish holidays such as passover and didn't allow anyone to observe the Sabbath. Concerning circumcision, any Jewish man who performed it on a Christian or even a Jew was to be mutilated and his property confiscated. The exact words used to refer to the mutilation are "veretri ex toto amputatione plectetur." Scott says that it "will not bear translation" but certainly falls under "cruel and unusual punishments." (S.P. Scott. *The Visigothic Code*. Boston Book Company. 1910. Page 386.) While I will not claim to know precisely what this involved, the entire penis was clearly amputated. The punishment for a woman who performed circumcisions was only slightly less harsh. Her nose was to be cut off and her property confiscated. (Scott. Page 386.)

While certainly cruel, the Jews had been mutilating Christians and pagan genitals for centuries at this point, despite being repeatedly asked to stop and despite having been granted legal exemptions to perform the procedure on their own men. I do not believe that Jews had a divine right to remove the foreskin of non-Jewish males under their patronage.

Law VI declared that Jews were to rest on Sunday along with Christians. Interestingly, however, this law reveals that the Jews had been working their Christian slaves on Sundays, thereby denying them the observance of their own religious rites. Jewish law forbade slaves to work on the Sabbath, so it may have been expected for them to force Christians to work on Sunday, lest they suffer a loss in productivity.

Law VII states that Jews could no longer discern between “clean” and “unclean” food, or rather they will not abide by kosher dietary laws. (Scott. Page 388.) It should be stressed that Jewish distinctions in foods are not made based on whether or not food is healthy, but whether or not it is prepared by a fellow Jew and meets certain related religious standards. Consider the practice of [Tevilat Kelim](#) whereby utensils acquired from non-Jews need to go through a ritual of purification before they can be used by a Jew. The practice probably arose in the Old Testament when the Israelites committed genocide against the Midianites. The book of Numbers tells us that the Jews:

...fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man. Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba—the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword. The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children and took all the Midianite herds, flocks and goods as plunder. They burned all the towns where the Midianites had settled, as well as all their camps. They took all the plunder and spoils, including the people and animals, and brought the captives, spoils and plunder to Moses and Eleazar the priest and the Israelite assembly at their camp on the plains of Moab, by the Jordan across from Jericho.

Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army—the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds—who returned from the battle.

“Have you allowed all the women to live?” he asked them. “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

“Anyone who has killed someone or touched someone who was killed must stay outside the camp seven days. On the third and seventh days you must purify yourselves and your captives. Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair or wood.”

Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone into battle, “This is what is required by the law that the Lord gave Moses: Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead and anything else that can withstand fire must be put through the fire, and then it will be clean. But it must also be purified with the water of cleansing. And whatever cannot withstand fire must be put through that water. On the seventh day wash your clothes and you will be clean. Then you may come into the camp.”

-Numbers 31:7-23 (NIV)

Returning to Erwig’s enactments at the 12th Council, Law VIII forbade Jews from engaging in incestuous marriages as defined by marrying within the 6th degree of relation. In practice, this meant they could not marry their 2nd cousins. Indeed, it is interesting that this should be seen as a form of persecution. Hollywood, for years, has made fun of White Americans as being largely inbred and incestuous, when in fact Europeans the world over have the lowest levels of consanguineous marriages in the world.

In any event, for as hostile as these laws are to the Jewish community, they often reveal Jewish hostility toward the Christian community. Law XI forbade the reading or distribution of books that denied the Christian faith. (Scott. Page 391.) This is more than likely a reference to the Talmud, which among other things states that Jesus is boiling in hot excrement in Hell for having ridiculed the words of the sages. The relevant passages are in Gittin 57a, but for a full breakdown of their context read Peter Schafer’s chapter on *Jesus’ punishment in Hell*, from his book *Jesus in the Talmud*.

In the interest of time, I'm not going to address the entire set of laws. Let us move on to what their aim was. Bachrach informs us that Erwig's policies were intended to...

...deter his enemies from providing protection and support for the Jews. For example, individual bishops and abbots had employed and were continuing to employ Jews as agents to administer ecclesiastical estates. These abbots and bishops were warned to stop the practice. Bishops convicted of having sexual relations with Jewish women were to be defrocked and sent into exile. Ecclesiastical and secular officials who failed to enforce Erwig's anti-Jewish laws were liable for a fine of seventy-two solidi for each offense they ignored. Anyone who accepted a bribe for not reporting a Jew who broke these laws was also liable for a fine. As part of the dejudification process every Jew was required to sign a statement abjuring Judaism and adhering to Christianity. These statements were to be placed in the archives of the churches in the areas where the new converts dwelled. It should be noted that none of these sworn statements have survived which may suggest a lack of widespread enforcement of Erwig's anti-Jewish policy. In addition we know that as late as 694 Jews still owned Christian slaves and carried on business as usual.

Bernard Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 19.

Chapter Fourteen:

Egica Enters the Scene

Erwig was succeeded by another anti-Jewish king, Egica, who ruled from 687 to 702. The Chronicle of Alfonso states that Erwig gave his daughter Cixilo in marriage to Egica, who was, as it turns out Wamba's nephew. Erwig, Collins suggests, may have married his daughter to Egica with the intention of rectifying his past transgressions against Wamba. Egica, Wamba's nephew, would be king, Cixilo, Erwig's daughter, queen, and thus Erwig's family would be protected and Wamba's family satisfied. If this was Erwig's intention, Collins says "this was a fatal miscalculation, as once he had become king Egica clearly felt it more expedient to rid himself of the connection, plunder the resources of Erwig's family and their allies, and free himself to marry again." (Roger Collins. Visigothic Spain 409-711. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 106)

The Chronicle of Alfonso states that when Egica gained the throne...

...his maternal uncle, King Wamba, ordered him to repudiate his wife Cixilo because her father Erwig had cunningly removed him from power. Egica followed his orders and dismissed her on some pretext. But before her repudiation, she had given Egica a son named Witiza whom the king made his partner in rule during his own lifetime. Egica ordered Witiza to live in the city of Tuy so that, while the father held the kingship of the Goths, the son would rule the Suevi. Egica ruled for ten years before the accession of his son and five more years with his son as co-ruler. He died a natural death in Toledo.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 131.

Yet, Alexander Pierre Bronisch points out that Egica could have only divorced Cixilio if she were guilty of adultery. (Alexander Pierre Bronisch. Precisiones Sobre Algunas Informaciones Históricas En La Crónica De Alfonso III. EDAD MEDIA. Rev. Hist., 12. Universidad de Valladolid. 2011. Page 46.) This would have carried great shame, and yet in the 7th canon of the 17th Council of Toledo, she is mentioned as the "*Glorious Queen Cixilo*," and the canon expounds upon how she and her children must be safeguarded in the unfortunate event that Egica dies prematurely. (Juan Tejada y Ramiro. Colección de cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia de España y de América, en latín y castellano, Tomo II. Imprenta de D. Pedro Montero. 1864. Page 602.) This was written seven years after Erwig's death, yet Egica was still married to Cixilo, and she was still the Queen.

Canon 8 of the 12th council which held session immediately after Erwig's accession to the throne, expressly concerns itself with divorce and under what circumstances a husband may leave his wife. Perhaps Egica may have attempted to dissolve the marriage long before he himself became king. But this relies upon the notion that Egica and Cixilo had been married some time in 670. Some people have asserted this, but I don't know what evidence truly supports it. It should be stressed that if this can be proven, it would seriously alter much of what has been said about the Sons of Wittiza in later years.

Eventually, a plot unfolded to kill Egica and usurp the throne. It was led by Bishop Sisebert of Toledo, Julian's successor. In fact, this revolt was initially successful in crowning and anointing a new king, Suniefred, who reigned long enough mint coins in his name. Collins, claims that the 9th canon of the 16th Council names Liuvigoto, Erwig's widow and Cixilo's mother, as one of

Sisebert's co-conspirators. (Collins. Page 106) Yet Thompson says the opposite, that Liuvigoto was one of Sisebert's targets. (Thompson. Page 244)

Perhaps the confusion arises from the use of the preposition "cum" to designate the relation between Sisebert and the other persons in question, who are either rendered victims or conspirators based on how one interprets the word. The late Juan Tejada who translated many of the councils from Latin into Spanish in the mid 1800s translated the relevant line in such a way that Liuvigoto is clearly an intended target of Sisebert. (Juan Tejada y Ramiro. Colección de cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia de España y de América, en latín y castellano, Tomo II. Imprenta de D. Pedro Montero. 1864. Page 576.)

That said, it is of note that Egica summoned a provincial synod in 691 whereby Cixilo's mother was thereafter to live out her days in a monastery. (Juan Tejada y Ramiro. Page 136.)

Thompson says, Egica did this "because he wanted to ruin his wife's relatives." (E.A. Thompson. The Goths in Spain. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 243) The canon does not mention Liuvigoto specifically, although, I suppose it didn't need to. Widowed Queens were to live out their days in a monastery, and Liuvigoto was a widowed queen. On the other hand, the text suggests a desire to protect royal widows from plots and conspiracies. If Liuvigoto had indeed been an intended target of Sisebert's and Suniefred's rebellion, this would perhaps make sense. Again, Cixilo is mentioned three years later at the 17th Council as "The Glorious Queen." (Tejada y Ramiro. Page 602.) Of course, it is the council's words, not Egica's. Either way, Egica was still married to her at the time.

Egica had sworn an oath to Erwig that he would protect Erwig's children and his family as if they were his own. But at the 15th Council Egica asserts to the Bishops that, since he was now king, this oath conflicted with the royal obligation to give justice to the people. Thompson writes that:

The wrongs that Erwig had inflicted upon the people, [Egica] declared, could not be righted without harm to Erwig's children. Perhaps he meant that Erwig had given to his children property that he had taken from those persons whom (according to Egica) he had wrongfully condemned: this could not be restored to its rightful owners without loss to Erwig's children. The new king, therefore, asked the bishops to release him from one or other of these contradictory oaths. He told them to put aside all fear and favour in coming to a decision; but the wording of his tome left them in no doubt as to which of the oaths he wished to discard. The bishops obliged him to the extent that they declared the public interest to be more important than the interests of a single family. But the oath in favour of Erwig's family must not be wholly disregarded: the King must love his people and his family equally. Justice must be done to both parties.

Egica also asked the bishops to reconsider canon four of the Thirteenth Council, the canon that called for the protection of Erwig's family. But in this case he was rebuffed: nothing in the canon forbade the imposing of a just punishment on Erwig's family if they deserved one. If Erwig's sons were guilty of a crime, the canon could not save them from the penalties of the law. But the tone of the bishops' answer is tart and impatient and shows something of the strong hand of Julian of Toledo. What the bishops did insist upon was that all judgements should be just.

E.A. Thompson. The Goths in Spain. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 242-243.

Thompson is entirely convinced that Egica was out to ruin Erwig's family. It is interesting that Erwig's wife was sent to live in a monastery only after Julian of Toledo died. Julian was a strong ally to Erwig, and if he had viewed this as a punishment, he probably wouldn't have allowed it. Still, I think that good arguments have been made in favor of various scenarios. It seems entirely possible that Erwig had usurped the throne from Wamba, used the kingship to acquire

properties unjustly and then took advantage of canon 4 of the 13th Council to shield his family from any future reprisals. Egica rather than seeking vengeance, perhaps was trying to address these crimes as honorably as he could.

Chapter Fifteen:

A Figment of Egica's Imagination?

The real interest of the 16th and 17th Councils is how they pertain to the Jews in Spain. Bachrach informs us that...

...After putting down Sisebert's revolt, [Egica] called the Sixteenth Council of Toledo which opened on 2 May 693. Egica had all those who conspired against him condemned, and it was ruled that their property was to be confiscated and their descendants were to be barred from public office. Bishop Sisebert was deposed and defrocked. Egica also promulgated a new anti-Jewish policy that increased the penalties imposed upon those who dealt with Jews illegally. Important people (**maiores**) were liable for a fine of 216 solidi, and unimportant people (**inferiores**) were liable to receive up to a hundred lashes with the whip and be fined at the king's will. All property held by Jews that had been obtained from Christians was to be confiscated by the crown, but compensation was to be paid. Jews were not permitted to carry on trade with Christians within the Visigothic kingdom, nor were they allowed to engage in long-distance commerce beyond its borders. In addition Jews were subjected to very burdensome taxes which they presumably could not pay, having lost their wealth. The bishops at the Sixteenth Council confirmed this law but specifically noted that they did so only at the king's behest.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 21.

Two things immediately stand out here: The first is that the Clergy didn't expressly approve the extent of Egica's anti-Jewish measures here; and the second is that despite Egica's hostility toward the Jews, he still required that they be compensated for their confiscated property. Even if, as it had been suggested, the compensation was not just, there is at least the pretense which strongly suggests Egica was not motivated by greed.

Thompson informs us on what happened next.

When the Seventeenth Council met on 9 November 694, the first subject that Egica mentioned in his tome was the Jews. He had heard an alarming piece of news. It was reported that in some parts of the world the Jews had rebelled against their Christian rulers and that many of them had been killed by the kings. He had now learned from 'confessions' that the Jews of Spain had conspired with Jews overseas to rise one and all against the race of Christians and to destroy the Christian religion. The confessions would make this clear to the bishops...

...[The Jews] had persevered in secret in their unbelief. Now, therefore, their wickedness must be ended, except for the Jews in Narbonensis, which was so ravaged by plague and Frankish raids that there were few inhabitants left there. The Jews of that province were simply to hand over their property to the dux.

In their eighth canon the bishops followed up the news of this 'conspiracy' - it was, of course, a figment or an invention of Egica's - with the last and most ruthless of all the laws relating to the Jews in Spain. Since the Jews had tried to bring ruin upon the fatherland and all the people, their cruel and astonishing presumption must be extirpated by an even crueller punishment. The bishops therefore decreed 'on the order of our most pious and most religious prince Egica' that [the Jews] should be stripped of all their property, and that they and their wives and children should be taken from their homes and enslaved forever throughout all the provinces of Spain. They would never be freed or given an opportunity to practise their religion. Some of their Christian slaves would be chosen by the King to take over their property and these men would pay the taxes that the Jews had hitherto paid. (The tax on Jews, as a French scholar has put it, outlived the Jews themselves.) The persons upon whom the King bestowed the enslaved Jews would have to sign an undertaking never to allow them to practise their rites. Finally, their children would be taken from them when they reached the age of 7 years and would be handed over to devout Christians to be brought up and in due course married off to Christians.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press 1969. Pages 247-248.

The French scholar to whom Edward Thompson refers here is Jean Juster, who was not only Jewish himself, but ironically said the following regarding the invasion of Spain.

...the Jews and Muslims of Africa united with the Jews of the Visigothic kingdom to destroy it. Their plots were discovered in time, however, and the Jews of the kingdom were all reduced to servitude. It would not be for long. The end of their persecution soon arrived with the Arabs, and once their rights were returned to them, the Jews of Spain were once again free to engage in commerce and other professions.

Jean Juster. *La Condition Légale Des Juifs Sous Les Rois Visigoths*. Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner. 1906. Page 61.

Juster not only believed that the Jews plotted against the Goths, but he was convinced that the Jews saw the Arabs as their liberators. I can't help but infer from his gleeful tone that in his mind, his fellow Jews had a right to buy and sell Christian slaves, and that Jewish religious freedom wasn't being honored as long as they couldn't freely mutilate everyone's genitals. Again, when Egica had heard of their plot in 694, the Jews still owned Christian slaves and circumcised them at will contrary to over a 100 years of secular and ecclesiastic law.

I'm continually left dumbfounded by the willingness to overlook any Jewish crimes as having contributed to this eventual outcome. This is not to say that the Visigoths did no wrong, but that's not the point. The Jews had been given numerous ultimatums, exceptions and exemptions, and the hostility against them went up commensurately as they ignored all of these.

As for the Jewish taxes surviving the Jews, this is true, and here is what Juster says:

When, because of their betrayal, Egica reduced all the Jews to servitude, so as not to lose the benefit of these special taxes, he freed the Christian slaves from the baptized Jews, slaves who should have gone to the treasury, and charged them to continue to pay the Jewish tax - something legally astonishing: this tax subsisted after the legal destruction of the Jews, after the annihilation of their civil personality, and now had to be paid by Christians, good Christians, Christians of origin. The Jewish tax survived the Jews.

Jean Juster. *La Condition Légale Des Juifs Sous Les Rois Visigoths*. Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner. 1906. Page 60.

The part "so as not to lose the benefit of these special taxes" while not entirely unreasonable is still conjecture. Here's Amnon Linder's translation of the pertinent lines of the 17th Council.

We have resolved, furthermore, that certain of the Christian slaves of those Jews should be chosen according to the choice made by our prince, and that they should receive as their personal property from [their former masters'] properties whatever our oft-mentioned lord should elect to grant in a royal document or in a document of manumission; and whatever duty to the public funds those Jews are known to have paid till now, their aforementioned slaves elected by our prince shall be obliged to pay in full without any excuse.

This is highly interesting, and at first glance seems to suggest that Egica was motivated by greed. But recall that the punitive taxes on the Jews were a measure meant to incentivize their conversion or departure. They weren't meant as a sustainable income. Katz even comments that "Egica augmented their taxes, although he had made it impossible for them to obtain money with which to pay." (Solomon Katz. *The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul*. University of Washington. 1937. Page 21) Also recall that at the Sixteenth Council of Toledo, a year prior, Egica had seen fit to compensate the Jews for their confiscated property. Why did he make such a gesture, if his motive was greed?

The idea of freeing Christian slaves from Jewish ownership and then placing them in charge of their former masters' estates and paying their taxes may have been intended as a way to impede Jews from using their former Christian slaves, or any other person, as proxy managers of their former estates, which would have thereby allowed them to not only retain Christian slaves but also evade punitive taxes meant to encourage their conversion or departure.

The texts do not say this explicitly, but they also don't say that Egica freed the Christian slaves and charged them to continue to pay the Jewish tax so that he might retain their benefit. It is clear from the record that the Jews were continually able to evade the law via bribes and other measures. The Councils repeatedly speak of this. Moreover, consider the following passage from the Talmud: "It is not the mouse that steals, but the hole that steals. In other words, a mouse cannot steal an item unless he has a hole in which to hide it." (Kiddushin 56b)

In any event, Juster had no question in his mind that the Jewish plot against the Visigothic kingdom was real and not a figment of Egica's imagination.

Bachrach challenges Thompson and others somewhat directly on this point:

Certain scholars have defended the Jews' loyalty to the monarchy and have argued that Egica's claim that the Jews sought foreign support to overthrow him was a "figment or an invention" ; the "doctors plot" is a ready parallel for the present-minded historian. Yet Egica's policy was pursued in seventh-century Spain, not in Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia; and we must evaluate the evidence in its own context, not in light of more modern events. Is there any reason to disbelieve Egica's charges? Had not refugae sought foreign aid to help rebel causes throughout much of the seventh century? Had not Jews actively participated in military operations against Wamba? Were not Jews sufficiently disadvantaged as a result of Egica's policies that they would benefit by opposing him actively? Egica was, after all, an extremely unpopular monarch who was condemned shortly after his death by a Christian writer as a king who "persecuted the Goths with bitter death."

Against the positive evidence which asserts that the Jews sought foreign aid to overthrow the king and the circumstantial evidence which provides additional support for the charges, we have only the timeworn prejudice that Jews are an unwarlike people; Jews do not fight but weep, discuss, and at most try to bribe their enemies. The uselessness of such stereotypes for the historian who is attempting to evaluate the evidence for a particular event at a particular time is manifest, and I therefore can find no reason to conclude that Jews did not scheme to overthrow Egica. It would have been strange indeed if they had not opposed him at least as vigorously as they had opposed Wamba when he came to power as the legitimate successor of a king who had pursued an anti-Jewish policy.

Chapter Sixteen:

The Downfall

Unfortunately, there are no more secular entries in the Visigothic legal code nor have the minutes of other Church Councils survived. Egica died, probably in 702, and his son, Wittiza reigned onward until his own death in 710. What we know of him is precious little. The closest contemporary source is the Chronicle of 754 which was authored by an anonymous Christian cleric living in Spain a few decades after the initial Muslim invasion. The next closest source is The Chronicle of Alfonso III, which was written in Northern Spain under the Christian Asturian dynasty. This text, however, was written in the 10th century, some 200 years after the events surrounding the initial downfall of Visigothic Spain.

The chronicle of 754, in reference to Wittiza, says that...

Although he succeeded to his father's throne petulantly, Witiza was most clement during the fifteen years that he remained in the kingship. He not only brought back to favour those whom his father had condemned to exile, but he did them service when they were restored. Indeed Witiza brought back to their former joy those whom his father had oppressed with a heavy yoke and he freely gave land back to those who had been deprived of it by his father. Finally he called everyone together and publicly and formally burned the pledges that his father had exacted by trickery. Not only did he release the innocent from, if you like, their unbreakable bonds, but he also returned from his own property, that which had long been alienated from the fisc, restoring it to the public domain.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Liverpool University Press. 1999. Page 104.

If Recesuinth had reversed the pro-Jewish policies of his father, Chindasuinth, it seems that Wittiza reversed the anti-Jewish policies of his father, Egica. This would fall into the same pattern of pro-Jewish/anti-Jewish vascillation of the previous century. While the text does not name the Jews specifically within this tract, its broad language may refer to them in places such as the line "release the innocent from their unbreakable bonds." The notion that Wittiza sought the support of the Jews is also attested to by the Chronicle of Lucas de Tuy, although it should be noted that Lucas was writing in the 13th century, and several scholars have voiced concerns over his trustworthiness. Bachrach acknowledges and addresses the concerns of scholars:

The two most damaging attacks on the evidence Lucas provides are based on his long separation in time from the events themselves and on the alleged enmity of the Church toward Witiza. It is true that Lucas portrays Witiza as a bad king. In doing so, however, he was merely following a well-established historiographical tradition. He passed on the picture that he found in his sources and added the "fact" that Witiza pursued a pro-Jewish policy. In defense of Lucas, it should be noted that his Chronicle is an uncritical grab bag of facts, stories, and legends gleaned from numerous written and oral sources. That Lucas personally shared in the "kirchliche Feindschaft" which is alleged to have motivated Witiza's "bad press" has not been proven. Yet even if it were demonstrated that Lucas shared this bias, it would not in itself constitute proof that he or his source fabricated the story of Witiza's pro-Jewish policy.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 23.

The Chronicle of 754 and the later Chronicle of Alfonso are at odds with each other in terms of how they portray Wittiza. The former states that Wittiza "ruled prosperously" and that "Everyone in Spain, confident in their great joy, eagerly rejoiced." (Wolf. Page 105.) The Alfonso text calls Wittiza

a “*reprobate*” who ruined Spain. (Wolf, Page 131.) Nevertheless, at times the two texts may possibly confirm each other in subtle ways.

For example, the Chronicle of Alfonso says that Witiza “dissolved the councils. He sealed the canons. He took many wives and concubines. And to prevent any council from being convened against him, he ordered the bishops, priests, and deacons to take wives. This, then, was the cause of Spain’s ruin.” (Wolf, Page 131.) While the Chronicle of 754 does not mirror this perfectly, it does say that Witiza together with a certain Bishop, Sindere, continually instigated and vexed the Church officials. (Wolf, Page 107.) Thus it seems fairly certain that Wittiza had done something to anger the Church. Various sources have indicated that there was an 18th Church Council under Witiza, and some scholars believe it possible that its acts were deliberately suppressed due to their controversial nature.

The Chronicle of 754 says that in 711, A visigothic noble named Roderic “rebelliously seized the kingdom of the Goths at the instigation of the senate.” (Wolf, Page 106.) This somewhat undermines the same text’s earlier claim that everyone in Spain rejoiced under Witiza’s rule, and reaffirms the Alfonso Chronicle’s assertion that Witiza was a despised king. Moreover, it may suggest armed conflict, whereby Wittiza was killed. Witiza was most likely still in his mid twenties, and while the text does not specify that he was killed, he’s never heard from again. Perhaps, the author skirted over the details, just as Isidore had done with Recarred II’s demise. The Chronicle of Alfonso, however, claims outright that “Witiza died a natural death in Toledo” and that Roderic “was elected king by the Goths.” (Wolf, Page 132.) As it turns out, Wittiza dying in his twenties may not be entirely indicative of foul play. The Chronicle of 754 mentions that he and his father had to vacate the capital in 701 due to an outbreak of plague, (Wolf, Page 106.) and numerous documents speak of outbreaks during the previous century. Perhaps, Wittiza simply died from plague later on.

Whether he was killed or not, virtually everyone concurs that what followed the end of his reign was a civil war, but this is where the agreement ends. The only hard evidence from the period are minted coins. Some bear the name Roderic and indicate a realm within Toledo and Egiltania. Others bear the name Achila and indicate a realm within Narbonne, Gerona, Tarragona, and Zaragoza. Thus it’s reasonable to assume that Roderic ruled in the Southwest, while someone else named Achila ruled in the Northeast. What’s odd though is that none of the texts mention Achila by name. Only Roderic.

The Chronicle of 754 states that around this same time, Arab and Moorish forces led by Tariq ibn Ziyad had been engaging in a series of raids in the South. In response, Roderic mustered forces to face this threat in battle where the Chronicle states that...

...the entire army of the Goths, which had come with him fraudulently and in rivalry out of ambition for the kingship, fled and he was killed. Thus Roderic wretchedly lost not only his rule but his homeland, his rivals also being killed, as Walid was completing his sixth year of rule.

The text goes on to describe the continued conquest of Musa ibn Nusayr:

After forcing his way up to Toledo, the royal city, he imposed on the adjacent regions an evil and fraudulent peace. He decapitated on a scaffold those noble lords who still remained, arresting them in their flight from Toledo with the help of Oppa, King Egica's son. With Oppa's support, he killed them all with the sword. He devastated not only Hispania Ulterior, but Hispania Citerior up to and beyond the ancient and once flourishing city of Zaragoza, which was now, by the judgement of God, openly exposed to the sword, famine, and captivity. He ruined beautiful cities, burning them with fire; condemned lords and powerful men to the cross; and butchered youths and infants with swords.

Wolf. Page 107.

This is Kenneth Wolf's translation, however. Other translations and historians do not agree on the line concerning Oppa. Edward Thompson, for example, translated it to mean that Musa in fact murdered Oppa, along with all the other Gothic nobles. Thompson says that:

Musa himself soon crossed to Spain, where civil war was now raging among the Goths, though the identity of the leaders on each side is unknown. He managed to enter Toledo and put to death among others Oppa, a son of Egica and brother of Wittiza; and he then advanced to beyond Saragossa, though it was at Cordoba that he established his headquarters.

E.A. Thompson. *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford University Press. 1969. Page 250.

As Collins points out, this passage may have been corrupted.

An equally difficult and possibly corrupt passage records how the Arab and Berber forces under the command of Musa took Toledo in 711, and how this was followed by the execution of various "noble lords" who were still in the city, on the pretext of their being involved in the flight of Oppa, a son of king Egica.

Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 133.

Collins' perspective here is that the nobles may have been executed for helping Oppa escape, which is entirely different from Thompson's take that Oppa was murdered. Bachrach is convinced that Oppa was the Archbishop of Seville and Achila's uncle. He states that Roderic was campaigning against the Basques when...

...an army led by Tarik ibn Ziyad landed in the south of Spain. Roderic gathered a large force including contingents led by Achila's supporters, Archbishop Oppas of Seville, and a noble named Sisebert. When Tarik's forces met Roderic's army near the lake of La Janda in southern Spain on either the 25th or 26th of July, those fighting men and magnates loyal to Achila deserted, and the Muslims won a decisive victory. During the next three years the Muslims subdued Roderic's kingdom. The Jews opposed Roderic's supporters and allied with the Muslims.

Bernard Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. University of Minnesota Press. 1977. Page 24.

The Chronicle of Alfonso states the following regarding the invasion.

After Witiza died, Roderic was anointed as king. In his time Spain grew even worse in its iniquity. In the third year of his rule, the Saracens entered Spain on account of the treachery of the sons of Witiza. When the king became aware of their invasion, he immediately went out with his army to fight against them. But, weighed down by the quantity of their sins and exposed by the treachery of the sons of Witiza, the Goths were put to flight. The army, fleeing to its destruction, was almost annihilated. Because they forsook the Lord and did not serve him in justice and truth, they were forsaken by the Lord so that they could no longer inhabit the land that they desired.

Wolf. Page 133.

There are many things to note here. The author directly contradicts the 754 text which claims that Roderic only ruled for a year. He thereby places the end of Roderic's reign and Tarik's invasion in the year 714. Visigothic coinage does not support these dates and suggests that Roderic's reign began in 710 and ended in 711. In the Rotense version of the Alfonso text, that is, the one I just quoted, the author doesn't go into detail about how Wittiza's sons betrayed the Visigoths. Yet, in the later Ad Sebastian version, the author leaves far less to the imagination and states that Wittiza's sons "possessed by envy, because Roderic had occupied their father's throne, they cleverly sent emissaries to Africa to ask the Arabs for help and they provided them with ships with which the Arabs were introduced into Spain." Although both versions may have been written around the same time, (Wolf. Page 38.), it is thought that the Bishop of Salamanca, Sebastian, upon receiving a copy from his uncle, the king felt it appropriate to flesh out more details.

While the 754 text may name Oppa as a traitor, a major problem with either version of the Chronicle of Alfonso, is that they both refer to Oppa as the son of Witiza, not Egica. Any son of Witiza would have been a child still in 712, since Witiza was probably born in 688, if Cixilo was indeed his mother as the Alfonso text claims. Assuming Witiza impregnated a woman at 13, that would make Oppa 10 when Muslim forces invaded Toledo. It's more probable that Oppa was Wittiza's brother, as the 754 text claims. As Collins said, the narrative in the Alfonso text is "totally self-contradictory." (Collins. Page 138.)

It's also not unreasonable to suspect that there was more than one historical figure named Oppa and the chronicles simply confused them. As Collins writes...

That Oppa cannot be both a son of Wittiza and a son of Egica, a laylord and a possible royal claimant and also bishop of Toledo or Seville must also be accepted. There may have been a bishop of Seville of this name at about this time, as testified in an episcopal list preserved in a late tenth-century manuscript. That Oppa could not be a son of Wittiza can also be shown. In any case, priority has to be given to the account of the Chronicle of 754 over the Alfonsine one, as it is so much closer in date. In fact it looks as if the Oppa of the Chronicle of Alfonso III derives from a garbled or poorly transmitted version of the events that are independently recorded in the 754 chronicle, but with some deliberate recasting and revision of them, intended to promote the ideological program of the Asturian monarchy.

Collins. Page 137.

Regarding betrayal of Roderic, here's Kenneth Wolf's translation again of the pertinent lines in the Chronicle of 754:

Roderic headed for the Transductine mountains to fight them and in that battle the entire army of the Goths, which had come with him fraudulently and in rivalry out of ambition for the kingship, fled and he was killed. Thus Roderic wretchedly lost not only his rule but his homeland, his rivals also being killed, as Walid was completing his sixth year of rule.

Wolf. Page 106.

Now here's a different translation by another scholar, Colin Smith.

Roderic met and joined battle with them and he was killed in the fight together with the entire Gothic Army as it fled, those who had supported him as he treacherously sought to win the crown. In this way, Roderic lost both the crown and his realm in the general destruction caused by rivalries.

Here is the original Latin for reference:

[Rodericus] In era DCCL transductinos promontoriis sese cum eis conflagando recepit eoque proelio fugatum omnem Gothorum exercitum, qui cum eo emulante fraudulenterque ob ambitionem regni advenerant cecidit. Sicque regnum simulque cum patriam male cum emulorum internicione amisit peragente Ulit anno sexto.

Most scholars concur with Wolf's translation, but a reflexive verb in the first clause may actually indicate that Roderic himself was fleeing alongside the army. Also, note that the original text, without any doubt, says that the 'entire Gothic army' fled, not a portion of it. It also does not name any traitors, nor does it use such a word to describe the rivals. While subsequent chronicles are often ready to blame Wittiza's sons, the 754 text doesn't even mention them. If anything it's benevolent toward their father, while it retains an otherwise harsh tone toward Roderic, who is seen as someone who tumultuously invaded Toledo, and who "wretchedly lost not only his rule but his homeland." (Wolf. Pages 106-107.) Roderic's ambition for the throne might be seen as the focal point rather than the fleeing army.

While I don't think this dissolves the notion of betrayal, I believe that it's entirely fitting that the Chronicle of 754 later says: "Who can relate such perils? Who can enumerate such grievous disasters? Even if every limb were transformed into a tongue, it would be beyond human capability to express the ruin of Spain and its many and great evils." (Wolf. Page 108.) The defeat of Spain happened so fast that no one was able to properly record it. Not even the Muslims, as I will shortly attempt to address. This was an age when people had to copy entire books by hand with feather pens. There would have been utter chaos as the kingdom's government collapsed in a matter of weeks and months. The temptation for subsequent Latin and Arab authors to fill in the gaps may have been substantial.

Chapter Seventeen:

The Arab Sources

The Arab sources, to my knowledge make no mention of Oppa, although several of them do focus on the sons of Wittiza and their alleged betrayal of Roderic. But even these don't mirror the Alfonso Chronicle's scenario of Wittiza's sons supplying the Arab invaders with ships. That is typically ascribed to a Byzantine governor in North Africa who assisted them after Roderic supposedly violated his daughter at the royal court. I'll discuss that in a moment, but for now, it must be stressed again here that all the evidence strongly suggests that Wittiza's sons were children in 711.

The Arab sources conflict on this very fact as well. Some of them claim that upon Wittiza's death, his wife ruled for a time due to his son's tender years, but that Roderic refused to accept her rule and invaded Toledo. (Pascual de Gayangos. *The History Of The Mohammedan Dynasties In Spain*, Vol 1. Page 254. See his notes on page 513) Other Arab sources contend that Wittiza's sons commanded the very armies that were sent to assist Roderic against the invaders. (Gayangos. Page 274. See his notes on pages 528 and 529.) One even goes so far as to claim that Roderic wrote them a letter petitioning their help despite his persecution of their family, apparently cautioning them against "the danger of private feuds." (Gayangos. Page 269.) As the account goes, the sons initially agreed, but later convived behind Roderic's back with Tarik, right before the battle that was to decide the fate of Spain. They told Tarik that they would abandon Roderic in battle, if Tarik will help restore them to their father's throne.

What immediately stands out about this account is that it contradicts the Alfonso Chronicle's claim that Wittiza's sons had sent emissaries to Africa, let alone gave Tarik ships. Roderic is also referred to by name, whereas Wittiza's sons are just repeatedly referred to generically as "Wittiza's sons." (Gayangos. Page 269.) Moreover, Roderic places them at the head of the right and left wings of his army. Even if he was desperate for their help, it seems doubtful that after he had killed their father, stolen their property and usurped the throne, that he would then place them in such positions where they could inflict massive harm on him.

Putting that aside, the general problems of the Arab sources are summed up best by Roger Collins who says the following:

To a large degree the problem is one of contradictions and confusion in the sources, resulting not least from the character of much of the Arab historiography of the western conquests. Thus the Arab historians writing in Egypt, North Africa, and Spain from the later ninth century onward often worked backward from contemporary conditions and practices and tried to find an explanation for their existence in terms of what had happened in the past.

Roger Collins. *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. Blackwell Publishing. 2004. Page 125.

With this in mind, some of the Arab accounts get exceedingly absurd in their soothsaying elements. For example, against the warnings of his advisers and courtiers, Roderic is said to

have broken into an enchanted palace containing among other things King Solomon's table. Within the palace he finds and opens a magic scroll that releases a curse upon himself and the kingdom. The curse read "Whenever this asylum is violated, and the spell contained in this urn broken, the people painted on this urn shall invade Andalus, overturn the throne of its kings, and subdue the whole country." (Gayangos. Page 263.) Naturally, the people painted on the scroll were Arabs, and upon seeing the Arab forces at the Battle of Guadalete, Roderic is reported to have cried out in horror. Since these were the same people from the scroll, he now knew that he was doomed. (Gayangos. Page 273.)

Not that I believe the Arab sources have no historical value, but it's difficult to discern where perceived fact ends and overt fantasy begins. One of the most audacious claims made by the Arab sources is that Roderic had an army of 100,000 men, (Gayangos. Page 271.) while the Muslims had only 12,000. Even were this the case, it would perhaps make the notion of any Visigothic pact with the Muslim forces even more ludicrous, depending on how those forces were split between Wittiza's sons and Roderic. If Roderic had the bulk of those forces, then abandoning him in battle would make little difference. If the forces were mostly on the side of Wittiza's sons, they would have no need to bargain with foreigners whom their grandfather had been warring against. If the forces were split fairly evenly, thereby creating an incentive for Wittiza's sons to use Tarik's forces against Roderic, then Tarik's forces would still be massively outnumbered by Roderic's contingency by about 4-1. Recall that the Visigoths had sacked Rome several times and repelled Byzantine invasions as well. These were not weak men, and the best armies in the world would have a hard time defeating them on an equal playing field.

[There is an Arab account that asserts that Wittiza's sons joined forces directly with Tarik and fought against Roderic directly. While this may have given Tarik a slight numerical advantage, it's an exceedingly doubtful account as most other Arab sources contradict it.](#)

Very frequently, the Arab sources give focus to a man named Julian, who was the alleged governor of Ceuta, a Byzantine outpost on the North African coast south of Spain. As the general story goes, Julian had sent his daughter to King Roderic's court where she was violated in some way, and in retaliation he gave the Arabs a fleet of ships to cross the strait.

On the historical character of Julian, Roger Collins says:

In reality both father and daughter are fictional creations, who belong to a set of moralizing traditions intended to make sense of the catastrophe that so rapidly overcame the Visigothic kingdom by means of a simple drama of human passions...As for the Arabs needing Julian's ships to make the very short crossing to Spain, it has to be asked how...they had been able to raid so extensively virtually all of the islands in the western Mediterranean in the course of the same decade?

Collins. Pages 129-130.

Keeping this in mind, 19th century Spanish historian, Rafael Altamira, gives a good summary of a more popular synthesis of the Arab sources concerning Julian's role:

...Julian was a Byzantine governor of Ceuta, and received assistance from Witiza in 708, when his city was attacked by the Muslims, and was therefore bound to the Visigothic king by ties of gratitude and possibly of self-interest. On the death of Witiza, when Julian was again attacked by the Arabs, he surrendered to them on condition that, during his lifetime, he might continue to hold the city of Ceuta under the supreme authority

of the Caliph. When Achila was deposed by Roderick, he sought help from Julian, who helped him by making a preliminary expedition to Spain, which was not successful. Then the family of Witiza had recourse to the Muslim chiefs, who were more powerful than Julian, and after long negotiations, thanks to his intervention, they succeeded in obtaining the support of the Arab troops of Africa, and thus managed to defeat Roderick.

The Cambridge Medieval History. Bury, J. B. 1911. Vol II. Page 184.

Again, this assumes Achila was Wittiza's son. To explain his young age, it's been asserted that Achila was granted the Northeastern provinces under the guidance of a dignitary. (The Cambridge Medieval History. Bury, J. B. 1911. Vol II. Page 182.) The pieces do fit to a degree; Wittiza would have been following the example of his father Egica who had made him co-ruler as a child. This might also explain why the earlier texts don't mention Achila by name, as he wouldn't have been old enough to be a real political player. Likewise the typical response to a king associating his son with the kingship was rebellion upon his death. Yet, the royal currency from the period indicates that his reign began after Wittiza's, not during, and unlike the coins minted under Egica and Wittiza, none of Achila's coins suggest coregency. Also from what I've read, the Arab chronicles that name Wittiza's sons, never list Achila as one of them.

Pascual de Gayangos, another Spanish historian and Arabist, also contends that "there is no historical evidence of [Wittiza] ever having sent troops to Africa" and that the author of the Arab source may have been attributing the actions of Wittiza's father Egica to Wittiza himself. During his reign, Egica, according to other Arab and Latin writers, had dispatched Theodemir, a Visigothic general "with a fleet to ravage the Mohammedan settlements along the coast of Northern Africa." (Gayangos. Page 512.) Theodemir is likewise recorded by the Chronicle of 754 as having put up prolonged resistance against the Muslim invaders before eventually negotiating peace terms. (Wolf. Page 121.) The evidence seen from this angle makes the notion of an alliance between Wittiza's faction and the Muslims very doubtful. If anything, it suggests that Wittiza's family would have been hated by them, and lends more credence to Thompson's translation of the pertinent lines in the Chronicle of 754, that Musa probably killed the Gothic nobles in Toledo for having allowed Oppa, Wittiza's brother, to flee the city.

Chapter Eighteen:

The Jewish Role

I suspect the Jewish apologists by now will have seized upon the notion that Egica's grandchildren betrayed the Visigoths to the Muslims, and gleefully exclaim that Egica's fears at the 17th Council of Toledo were projections of his own treasonous disposition that would later manifest into action against his own people. Admittedly, the behavior of the Visigothic Refugae during the 7th century lends some credence to the idea that Wittiza's family could have sought aid from Julian of Ceuta, who in turn brokered a deal with his Muslim overlords. Perhaps the strongest evidence against these stories though is that there's no real explanation as to how or why Tarik and Musa didn't hold up their end of the bargain. Wittiza's sons were obviously not restored to the throne, and even Achila's territory fell shortly afterwards.

Curiously, if there is one thing the Arab sources are consistent about, it's that the defenses of numerous cities were handed over to Jewish locals after their initial conquest. Gayangos, informs us.

The practice so universally observed by the invaders of intrusting to the Jews the defense of the cities and fortresses taken from the Christians, would, in the absence of any other fact, show that a previous understanding must have long existed between them and the Berbers under the orders of Tarik, and that the discontent or the ambition of Julian, the wrongs done to the sons of Wittiza, and the troubled state of the Gothic monarchy, were not the only causes of the conquest of Spain. That the Jews of the Peninsula had at different times been suspected of holding communication with those of Africa, that in the reign of Egica they had actually been accused, and to all appearances convicted, of inviting the Arabs to make a conquest of Spain, is sufficiently attested by the national writers. I have shown elsewhere on the authority of Ibn Khaldun, that most of the Berber tribes inhabiting the northern shores of Africa professed the Jewish religion, and although we are told that the twelve thousand men which Musa placed under the orders of Tarik had previously been converted to the Mohammedan faith, and duly instructed in all the duties of their new religion by theologians appointed for that purpose, there is every reason to suppose that their conversion was neither so sudden nor so sincere as to blot out immediately all recollection of their former habits and religious ceremonies, and that they felt great sympathy for their former brethren. Hence, on the invasion of Spain by the Berbers, the Jews, who expected to be delivered by them from the state of oppression in which they lived, every where made common cause with them.

Pascual de Gayangos. The History Of The Mohammedan Dynasties In Spain, Vol 1. Page 531.

While the downfall of Spain cannot and should not be entirely attributed to Jewish elements, they were certainly a factor. Prior to WW2, virtually all academics, Jewish and Gentile alike, were in agreement on this. The 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia stated that it is...

...a fact that the Jews, either directly or through their coreligionists in Africa, encouraged the Mohammedans to conquer Spain and that they greeted them as their deliverers. After the battle of Jerez (711), in which African Jews fought bravely under Kaula al-Yahudi, and in which the last Gothic king, Rodrigo, and his nobles were slain, the conquerors Musa and Tarik were everywhere victorious.

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13940-spain#anchor4>

19th century Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz claimed that:

The Jews of Africa, who at various times had emigrated thither from Spain, and their unlucky co-religionists of the Peninsula, made common cause with the Mahometan conqueror, Tarik, who brought over from Africa into Andalusia an army eager for the fray. After the battle of Xeres (July, 711), and the death of Roderic, the last of the Visigothic kings, the victorious Arabs pushed onward, and were everywhere supported by the

Jews. In every city that they conquered the Moslem generals were able to leave but a small garrison of their own troops, as they had need of every man for the subjection of the country; they therefore confided them to the safe-keeping of the Jews. In this manner the Jews, who but lately had been serfs, now became the masters of the towns of Cordova, Granada, Malaga, and many others. When Tarik appeared before the capital, Toledo, he found it occupied by a small garrison only, the nobles and clergy having found safety in flight. While the Christians were in church, praying for the safety of their country and religion, the Jews flung open the gates to the victorious Arabs (Palm-Sunday, 712), receiving them with acclamations, and thus avenged themselves for the many miseries which had befallen them in the course of a century since the time of Reccared and Sisebut. The capital also was entrusted by Tarik to the custody of the Jews, while he pushed on in pursuit of the cowardly Visigoths, who had sought safety in flight, for the purpose of recovering from them the treasure which they had carried off.

Heinrich Graetz. History of the Jews, Vol. 3. Page 109.

Graetz is referencing here, among other things, to Lucas de Tuy's account, which records that in the year the Moors invaded, the Catholic inhabitants of Toledo left the protection of their walls on Palms Sunday and went to the Holy Church of Saint Leocadia to listen to the divine sermon. The Jews, according to Lucas, informed the Muslims of this, and then closed the gates of the city before the Catholics could return and opened them for the invaders. While this may very well be an embellishment or distortion of the facts, I will say that if we are going to take 16th century Jewish accounts seriously, as does Solomon Katz, then we should also take 12th century Catholic accounts seriously.

Speaking of which, Solomon Katz in 1936 didn't deny Jewish involvement but rather justified it:

Driven to desperation, the Jews, both baptized and non-baptized, asked aid from their brethren in Africa, and made plans to deliver Spain to the more tolerant Moors. The plot was discovered in time, and Egica immediately called the Seventeenth Council (9 November 694), and before it related the crime against the state. He demanded that measures be taken against all, even baptized, Jews. Only those of Septimania, dwelling in the mountain passes and necessary for the protection of that province, were exempt from his laws, on condition that they become Christians. All others were declared slaves, their goods were confiscated, and they themselves scattered in the various provinces. They were assigned to Christian masters who had to swear never to free them. These masters had to guard against any observance of the Jewish rites by their newly acquired slaves. Jewish children were to be removed from the home of their parents at the age of seven and sent to Christian schools and later married to Christians. These measures were sanctioned by the king. A number of Jews escaped in time; the others were reduced to slavery. Witiza (700-711) would probably not have freed the Jews from these unparalleled oppressions. Under his successor, however, the Jews were revenged. When in 711 the Arabs invaded Spain, they are said to have found in each city a faithful band of Jews to welcome them and to help them. Two centuries of ruthless persecution had ended for the Jews.

Solomon Katz. The Jews In The Visigothic And Frankish Kingdoms Of Spain And Gaul. University of Washington. 1937. Pages 21-22.

After WW2, there seems to have been a shift toward downplaying and minimizing the Jewish role. Norman Roth has an interesting paper with this aim. (Norman Roth. The Jews and the Muslim Conquest of Spain. Jewish Social Studies, Vol. 38, No. 2, Spring, 1976, pp. 145-158. Indiana University Press.) He makes some good points, but overall, fails to convince. He attempts to undermine the evidence that Jewish troops from Africa fought in the invasion, questions how many of the Berber tribes at the time were Jewish, and he also says that Toledo was in fact abandoned when Tarik showed up, and therefore the Palms Sunday story must be a myth. There is an Arab source that claims Tarik found Toledo "deserted" but it's somewhat contradictory in that, it also claims that afterwards, Tarik gathered the city's Jews before continuing his pursuit of the Goths. Obviously the city wasn't deserted of Jews, and that probably says something in and of itself. I don't have access to the original text attributed to 11th century scholar, ibn Hayyan, but considering Al-Makkari's description, it seems somewhat in line with the Chronicle of 754's assertion that not all but many of the Gothic nobles

and clerics had fled the city. Perhaps “deserted” here simply refers to the city’s main defenses and aristocracy. The Chronicle of 754 clearly states that there was a massacre of noble men.

While the Arab accounts have many issues, I think the consistency of the non-central role they ascribe to the Jews and the previous century of Judeo-Christian hostilities render them credible in this regard. Egica had accused the Jews of plotting against Spain, and they even signed a confession admitting as much. Although the 754 Chronicle tells us that Egica used trickery to get various people to sign false documents, and this may include the Jewish confessions. But this then falls into the same previous pattern of Gothic vacillation on Jewish policies and therefore may represent more evidence that Wittiza did in fact pardon the Jews. This in turn may have upset some of the clerics and nobles who then encouraged Roderic to invade Toledo when Wittiza died. Perhaps this is why everyone seems to have hated Wittiza in later years and were ready to blame his family for all of Spain’s ills.

Whatever the case, the Jews had clear motive, opportunity, and ability to seek foreign invasion. They had precedent in supporting rebellions in and outside of Spain. They were also well connected merchants, slavers and bankers. They would have had intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the state, its defenses, its resources and so on. This might help explain how the Arabs and Moors so quickly conquered a region and people who had been able to continually repel Byzantine invasions.

In any event, the Jewish role in the conquest is credible, even coming from the Arab sources, because it is never described via endlessly contradictory accounts. The accusation is straightforward and consistent. The Jews suffered under the Goths, and thus encouraged invasion. Then when it arrived, they supported it. If Nathan Roth wants to cling to the idea that none of the invading Berbers were Jewish, that’s fine, and I’m willing to grant him that. I’m not entirely convinced that Lucas de Tuy made up his story about Palms Sunday, but if it makes anyone feel better, I’ll concede that it as well. The fact that the Jews were entrusted to hold the territory for the invading armies says enough on its own. Notice how many of the Jewish authors prior to WW2 describe the invasion as “revenge.” Judaism is many things, but it’s never been eager to forgive its enemies. The tract of the Talmud that deals with Jesus boiling in excrement addresses numerous historical figures who had wronged the Jews and explains what their punishments were to be after death. (Gittin 57a)

As for the exact details of the invasion, we will likely never know. The Visigothic kingdom was already in decay. It had suffered numerous outbreaks of plague, internal rebellions, Byzantine invasions and even a cooling period that contributed to crop failure and famine. It should be stressed that had the Jews not been a factor in Spain, the Muslims may have invaded regardless. And if they didn’t, the Byzantines might have tried again. If neither of these, then certainly the Basques or Franks would have caused more problems. Regardless, diversity was not Visigothic Spain’s strength, and it is reasonable to think that had the Jews not been present in Spain at the time, the Visigothic kingdom might not have been conquered, as the Muslims would not have had a homegrown support group.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, it was beyond the scope of this series to address the supposed Judeo-Islamic Golden Age that followed the Arab conquest. Hopefully though, I've convinced some people that Jewish behavior contributed to their own persecution under the Visigoths, or at the very least that they were not tolerant bystanders just minding their own business. Most of the anti-Jewish laws had a Jewish counterpart. Jews did not allow interfaith marriages, nor did they approve of Jews being enslaved by or working for Christians. In addition to cases of Christians forcibly baptising Jews, there were recorded instances of Jews forcibly circumcising Christian slaves. While the Jews were taxed punitively toward the end of the century, usury of non-Jews had historically been a religiously sanctioned practice of Judaism.

Hostility toward the Jews increased exponentially as it became apparent that they had no intention of respecting initially reasonable Christian requests. The point from which many scholars assert that interfaith relations deteriorated was when Reccared decreed that Jews could no longer own Christian slaves. The Jews ignored the law, probably because their economy heavily depended on Christian slave labor. Thenceforth a cat and mouse game ensued with the Jews bribing the worst elements of society so that they might carry on business as usual. In response the Christians made increasingly confused and seemingly incoherent laws in vain attempts to address this.

Eventually, the situation culminated with the Catholics seeking either the conversion or departure of the Jews. The Jews responded by plotting to overthrow the kingdom entirely. Egica enslaved them. Wittiza perhaps freed them. The Muslims invaded. The Jews supported them, probably because they figured it was a matter of time before new leadership would persecute them again. The Visigoths, divided internally, were driven from their lands. Many who could not escape were slaughtered. Those who survived had to live under dhimmi status, and were often bought and sold as slaves in the following years by the same Jews who had been persecuted prior. On the nature of the conquest, Pascual de Gayangos wrote that "populous towns were not unfrequently razed to the ground, and their inhabitants, amounting to several thousands, led into captivity." (Pascual de Gayangos. *The History Of The Mohammedan Dynasties In Spain*, Vol 1.

Page 510.)

One important facet of the persecution of the Jews was that while the Catholics wanted them to assimilate, whereas the Jews wanted to remain separate. As the 19th century French Scholar, Ernest Renan, once said "a nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a subdivision against its will." Yet, the Jews of Spain were not seeking traditional sovereignty, as one normally understands it, but rather unrestricted, unqualified access to Gentile society for the purposes of exploitation. This, I argue, the Visigoths and Catholics were under no obligation to respect or tolerate. Had the Jews been mostly recluse, or had they respected the religious boundaries of Christians there is no indication that they would have been targeted. Again, what stands out about the Visigoths is that they tolerated hostile Jewish behavior for a very long time

before they made any serious attempt to address it. And when they did, the Jews sought vengeance against them, more or less, for having attempted to defend themselves.

To a very real extent, the ancient war between the Greco-Romans and the Jews never really ended. But rather, it broadened in scope to include Visigothic Spain and Byzantium. The Jews to one degree or another believe that they are supposed to inherit all the nations of the world, and that they are supposed to be priestly class to all of humanity. Yet, almost everywhere the Jews have gone in Europe, they've eventually been expelled, almost without exception. This is not because of some irrational, baseless hatred. It's because, at their core, Jews are moral particularists, whereas Europeans are moral universalists.

Not only does this make us fundamentally incompatible, but it also makes any dialogue of reconciliation virtually impossible, unless it is done in an utterly submissive manner in Jewish favor. The Jews will not admit to any transgression. Perhaps this is because they are unable to understand how they've harmed anyone. Or perhaps they are able to do so, but simply prefer not to. Either way, admitting to transgressions would nullify the strategy of victimhood, which not coincidentally only works on Europeans.